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In a relief, Karnataka HC lifts ban on bike taxis

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

The Karnataka High Court on Friday lifted the ban on bike taxi services in the State, setting aside an earlier single-judge order that had upheld the state government's prohibition on their operations.

A division bench headed by the Chief Justice ruled after hearing appeals by app-based aggregators, including Ola and Uber, that motorcycles can be used as transport vehicles, subject to permissions under existing laws and directed them that they must apply for the required licences. The state government is obligated to issue permits in accordance with prevailing legal provisions, the bench ruled.

The ruling brings relief to thousands of bike taxi riders who had been affected after services were halted following the High Court's refusal earlier in June to stay the government's ban. .

The Namma Bike Taxi Association, representing bike taxi riders across Karnataka, had repeatedly urged the government to reconsider the ban. In June, the association also wrote to Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, seeking his intervention to protect the livelihoods of lakhs of gig workers in the state.

"Over 1,00,000 gig workers in Bengaluru and across Karnataka are losing their right to earn and feed their families because of a blanket ban on bike taxi services," the association said in its letter, describing the ban as a threat to the dignity and survival of riders dependent on the sector for daily income. *—ANI*

PHOTO: AI

PM sounds poll bugle in TN, Kerala; Tears into LDF, DMK

Says Sabarimala probe is his guarantee; calls DMK 'CMC' govt

T'PURAM/CHENNAI, 23 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday tore into ruling governments in Kerala and Tamil Nadu ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

Campaigning in Kerala for the first time since the BJP's historic victory in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, Modi targeted the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) over the alleged gold theft at the Sabarimala temple. Capitalising on the sensitive Sabarimala issue, he accused the Vijayan government of undermining temple traditions and promised action if the BJP came to power and it is Modi's guarantee.

"Now, there are reports of gold being stolen from the shrine. Gold has been stolen from God. I make it clear that as soon as a BJP government is formed, the allegations will be examined in detail and the culprits will be put in jail," he said.

Modi also accused the LDF of corruption and launched a blistering attack on the Congress, branding it a "compromised coalition" ideologically tied to the Muslim League and Maoists. Referring to it as "MMC" — Muslim League Maoist Congress — he claimed Kerala was being used as a "testing ground" for its strategies.

The Assembly polls are expected in three to four months for the 140-member House.

Modi flagged off three Amrit Bharat Express trains and a Thrissur-Guruvayur passenger train which will help to enhance regional rail connectivity between Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Later, in Tamil Nadu, Modi launched the NDA's poll campaign for the 2026 Assembly elections with an all-out attack on the ruling DMK, calling it a "CMC government — Corruption, Mafia and Crime". He asserted that the countdown for the DMK's exit had begun.

Addressing a massive rally attended by top alliance leaders including AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami, AMMK leader TTV Dhinakaran, PMK's Dr Anbumani Ramadoss and TMC-M leader GK Vasan, Modi said a BJP-NDA "double-engine government" was inevitable. Incidentally, old foes Palaniswami and Dhinakaran shared the stage for the first time in many years, with each complimenting the other and stressing the common goal to show the door to the DMK in the hustings.

Accusing the DMK of breaking public trust, Modi also attacked it over the Karthigai lamp lighting row, alleging disrespect towards Lord Murugan and the judiciary for electoral gains. *—PTI*

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan during the flagging off of new train services in Thiruvananthapuram **PHOTO: PTI**

Legislative Council adjourned over alleged insult to Guv

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Karnataka Legislative Council (LC) proceedings were adjourned on Friday after a noisy confrontation over an alleged insult to Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot by Congress MLC BK Hariprasad.

The disruption followed an incident a day earlier, when Hariprasad attempted to stop the Governor as several Congress legislators tried to gherao him after he concluded his address to the joint session of the Legislature.

As the Council convened on Friday, BJP MLCs demanded Hariprasad's suspension, accusing him of unruly conduct. "We won't tolerate hooliganism. He has insulted the Governor. Suspend Hariprasad," they shouted.

Congress MLCs and ministers countered the demand, shouting slogans against the BJP. Chairperson Basavaraj Horatti intervened, urging members to maintain decorum and reprimanding some legislators.

Leader of Opposition Chalavadi Narayanaswamy said Hariprasad's behaviour was unacceptable and rejected Congress claims that the Governor had insulted the national anthem. "The anthem was never played when the Governor walked away," he said, adding, "Insult to the Governor is an insult to the Constitution."

Responding, Hariprasad said the Governor should have waited for the national anthem and his departure amounted to disrespect. Horatti said the note regarding the alleged insult did not name anyone. "I have sought details of the joint session. Let the report come," he said. With the House remaining in disorder, the chairperson adjourned the Council. The adjournment halted proceedings amid continued sloganeering and no immediate resolution from either side emerged. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Two more activists get bail in Elgar case

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Two more accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case were granted bail by the Bombay High Court on Friday on the grounds of parity, noting that several other co-accused had already been granted similar relief. A bench of Justices A S Gadkari and SC Chandak ordered release of Sagar Gorkhe and Ramesh Gaichor, who have been in Navi Mumbai's Tajola jail since their arrest in September 2020, and directed them to furnish a bail bond of Rs 1 lakh each. The two, alleged to be the activists of banned CPI (Maoist) group, have been asked to visit the National Investigation Agency office once a month. *—PTI*

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Pannun booked for threatening unrest on R-Day

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Delhi Police Special Cell has registered an FIR against Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, designated terrorist and Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) leader, for allegedly threatening to disturb peace ahead of Republic Day. Police stated the action followed a social media video where Pannun claimed his "sleeper cells" pasted pro-Khalistan posters in parts of Delhi, including Rohini and Dabri, as part of a conspiracy. Police conducted searches but found no posters. An officer said, "The claims made by Pannun regarding posters have not been substantiated so far." Security has been heightened across Delhi, and investigation continues. *—PTI*

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On Netaji's 129 b'day, calls grow to bring back ashes

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Daughter of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Anita Bose Pfaff, has urged repatriation of his father's ashes from Tokyo's Renkoji Temple to India, seeking a dignified final rite. On the occasion of the 129th birth anniversary of Netaji Bose, Pfaff said in a statement from Germany, "I invite the Indians of today who still revere him to support his posthumous return from exile; to support the transfer of his mortal remains to India for a final and fitting disposal." After Japan's surrender, Bose left Singapore for Tokyo but was involved in a plane crash in Taipei on 18 August, 1945. He initially survived the crash but passed away later and was cremated in Taipei. His ashes were taken to Japan. *—Agencies*

'Border 2' barred in Gulf over anti-Pak sentiment

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

'Border 2' is banned in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE due to its perceived 'anti-Pakistan' sentiment, despite a wide global release on 23 January. The film, directed by Anurag Singh, marks Sunny Deol's return, featuring Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh, and Ahan Shetty. It is a war drama set during the 1971 India-Pakistan War, showcasing Indian soldiers using fictional and real events to highlight the valor of the Indian Armed Forces. Bollywood Hungama reported that "films perceived as having 'anti-Pakistan' content don't get a release in this bel,". 'Dhurandhar' was also not released in these countries. *—PTI*

JeM commander killed in J&K's encounter

JAMMU, 23 JAN

Security forces eliminated a top Pakistani terrorist linked to the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) on Friday in an encounter in the Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said.

Inspector General of Police, Jammu range, Bhim Sen Tuti, said the terrorist was shot during an operation in Billawar.

"A Jaish terrorist was neutralised by a JKP (J&K Police) team in a joint operation with the Army and the CRPF in Billawar," he said on X.

Officials identified the terrorist as JeM commander Usman alias "Abu Maviya." They said that a large quantity of arms were recovered from him in the Parhetar area.

"The operation was launched by the Army and the Police on 23 January in Parhetar. In a precise strike by the joint forces, one foreign terrorist was eliminated," Army's Rising Star Corps said in a separate post on X.

The officials said Usman was one of the most wanted JeM terrorists active in the Udhampur-Kathua belt. *—PTI*

22 BOOKED

Bengaluru college students assault juniors with rods, 3 held

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

A FIR has been registered against 22 college students and an outsider for allegedly ragging their juniors and assaulting a staff member.

Three of the accused have been arrested, while efforts are on to nab the remaining suspects, who are absconding, the police said on Friday.

A case was registered on 16 January based on a complaint lodged by Midhun Madhavan, head of the admissions department at Akash Group of Institutions in Devanahalli, police said.

The senior students allegedly assaulted the juniors and Madhavan. Naveen, an outsider accompanying the seniors, also allegedly attacked them using rods, sticks and stones.

According to the complaint, the accused allegedly ragged first-year students on the campus on 14 January and forced them to follow their orders, including fetching cigarettes and drinks and carrying their books. When the juniors approached Madhavan, he warned the senior students against repeating such acts.

On 15 January, the seniors allegedly resumed ragging, prompting the juniors to once again report the matter to Madhavan, who met the seniors and warned of action.

The accused have been booked under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Karnataka Education Act, police said. *—PTI*

A video has gone viral showing senior students of the Akash Group of Institutions in Devanahalli allegedly assaulting junior students **PHOTO: X**

Following 25 deaths in Indore in December, 22 people are now sick in Mhow after consuming toxic water **PHOTO: X**

22 sick in Indore as water contaminated again

INDORE, 23 JAN

- Indore, repeatedly ranked as India's cleanest city, is reeling from a major public health crisis caused by drinking water contamination. As of 23 January, the death toll has officially reached 25.

The drinking water contamination crisis has resurfaced in parts of Indore district, with at least 22 people falling ill in Mhow tehsil after consuming suspected contaminated supply.

The cases were reported from Chander Marg and Patti Bazaar on Thursday night. Nine patients were hospitalised, while others are being treated at home under medical supervision. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea and, in some cases, jaundice, triggering concern amid memories of last month's deadly outbreak in Bhagirathpura.

Indore District Collector Shivam Verma rushed to Mhow late Thursday night, visited the hospital, interacted with patients and residents, and inspected the affected localities. He directed doctors and health officials to ensure prompt and effective treatment, stressing zero tolerance for negligence.

Health department teams have been stationed on site since Friday morning under CMHO Dr Madhav Hasani. Water samples are being tested to trace the contamination source, while teams from Indore Medical College and specialist doctors have also been deployed. Verma instructed the Mhow Cantonment Board to check water quality, maintain sanitation and survey affected areas.

Regional MLA Usha Thakur visited the hospital and assured support. The outbreak follows the Bhagirathpura crisis, where contaminated water caused illness and seven deaths, including an infant. Officials said Friday. *—Agencies*

Cong suspends Rajeev Gowda for using abusing municipal head

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Congress in Karnataka on Friday suspended Rajeev Gowda from the party, who had used abusive words against Shidlaghatta Municipal Commissioner.

Congress leader is on the run after an FIR was registered against him on 14 January following a complaint by Amrutha Gowda, who alleged that he had abused her and threatened her with dire consequences over phone for removing a banner with his photograph.

In the order, the Congress state disciplinary committee president K Rahman Khan said, considering the gravity of the matter, Rajeev Gowda has been suspended from the party.

The police have not been able to trace him even after 10 days of the incident. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FB

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Three killed in bus and tourist vehicle collision in Udupi

UDUPI, 23 JAN

Three people were killed after a bus collided head-on with a tourist vehicle in the district on Friday, police said. The accident took place on the Karkala-Bajagoli National Highway near Miyar. The impact of the collision was so severe that the bus was extensively damaged, they said. Several others injured in the accident were immediately shifted to a nearby hospital. Their condition is said to be stable.On receiving information, Karkala police rushed to the spot and carried out an inspection.The traffic movement on the stretch was briefly affected before being restored. The identity of the deceased is yet to be confirmed, police said. Investigation is on, they added. ***—PTI***

Flyer held with hydroponic ganja worth Rs 70L at KIA

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Customs officials on Friday said they arrested a passenger at the Kempegowda International Airport on Friday who arrived from Bangkok carrying hydroponic ganja worth Rs 70.35 lakh.The passenger's identity has not been disclosed. "In the early hours of 23 January, officers at the Kempegowda International Airport's Terminal 2 intercepted a passenger from Bangkok and seized 2.01 kg of hydroponic ganja, valued at Rs 70.35 lakh," Bengaluru Customs said in a post on 'X.'The accused passenger has been apprehended by the authorities under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of the crime. Police said the further probe into the incident is underway.***—PTI***

Painter dies after falling from building in Mysuru

MYSURU, 23 JAN

A 40-year-old painter died after accidentally falling from an apartment building he was painting on Thursday evening on Deewans Road in the City. Police have identified the deceased as Satish, a resident of Kyathamaranahalli in Mysuru district. Lakshmipuram police registered a case based on a complaint filed by Satish's family and have begun an investigation into the incident. In their complaint, family members alleged negligence on the part of Deepak, the contractor who had engaged Satish for the painting work. They claimed safety measures were inadequate at the work site and held the contractor responsible for the fatal fall. The family has sought compensation, police said action will follow the inquiry findings.***—SALAR NEWS***

Three held in Mysuru youth's murder case

MYSURU, 23 JAN

Udayagiri police on Friday arrested three men in connection with the murder of Shahbaz, 26, of Gowsianagar in the City. The accused, including Zubair, all residents of the same locality, were taken into custody following preliminary investigations that pointed to a dispute over autorickshaw parking and fare collection as the motive. Police said that around midnight on Monday, Zubair and five associates allegedly attacked Shahbaz with sharp weapons when he arrived to park his two-wheeler at a rented space in Gowsianagar, killing him on the spot. A case has been registered and efforts are on to trace two other accused who remain absconding. Investigators say dispute between Shahbaz and Zubair triggered the fatal assault. ***—SALAR NEWS***

BJP flags Rs 2.5K cr excise scam in State

LoP Ashoka alleges diversion of liquor licensing bribes to fund expenses in poll-bound States

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

The Opposition BJP on Friday demanded the resignation of Karnataka Excise Minister RB Timmapur, alleging a Rs 2,500-crore scam in the State's Excise Department, triggering heated scenes in the Assembly.

Raising the issue, Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka alleged that bribes collected through liquor licensing were being diverted to fund election expenses in poll-bound states such as Assam and Kerala. He also claimed that liquor licences were being "auctioned" in violation of prescribed norms.

The confrontation began when Speaker UT Khader asked Congress MLA AS Ponnanna to move the motion of thanks to the Governor's address. Ashoka objected, insisting that his adjournment notice on the alleged excise scam be taken up first. The Speaker ruled that the matter could not be discussed under an adjournment motion and could be taken up later under a different rule.

LoP R Askoka and Karnataka Excise Minister RB Timmapur ***PHOTO: PTI***

However, Ashoka and BJP MLA Sunil Kumar demanded that their preliminary submission be heard before the notice was rejected. Following their insistence, the Speaker allowed Ashoka to make a brief submission.

- The Opposition BJP demanded the resignation of Karnataka Excise Minister RB Timmapur, alleging the crore rupees scam in the State's Excise Department, triggering heated scenes in the Assembly

"There is some audio evidence…In the Excise Department, licences are being auctioned off. The Minister and his son's name has surfaced in the scam. This is said to be the third instance," Ashoka alleged.

He accused the state government of corruption and said a complaint had been lodged with the Lokayukta. "The complaint has been registered against the Minister. The allegation is not only based on the audio; there is also a formal complaint. This is an important issue and it needs to be discussed," he said.

Despite assurances from the Speaker that the issue would be discussed later, BJP legislators continued to press for an immediate debate. "There are kickbacks involved. How can discussion on this be delayed?" Sunil Kumar asked. Ashoka reiterated that bribe money was allegedly being collected for elections in Assam and Kerala.

As the House proceeded with scheduled business and Ponnanna moved the motion of thanks, seconded by Congress MLA Pradeep Eshwar, BJP members staged a protest demanding the Minister's resignation. Amid sloganeering, the Speaker adjourned the House for lunch.

The BJP cited a recent Lokayukta operation in which Excise Dy Commissioner Jagadeesh Naik, Superintendent Thammanna KM and constable Lakkappa Gani were caught allegedly accepting a Rs 25 lakh bribe. They were accused of demanding Rs 80 lakh for hotel and microbrewery licence. *—PTI*

BUSY DAY AT THE SOUDHA

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, along with Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad, Political Secretary to the CM Naseer Ahmed and others, during unveiling of the statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 129th birth anniversary at Vidhana Soudha on Friday. School students also visited to catch a glimpse of the Assembly session ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

BJP seeks action against Cong MLAs for disrespecting Guv

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

The BJP in the Legislative Assembly on Friday demanded that Speaker UT Khader take disciplinary action against Congress MLAs who allegedly "disrespected" Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot during the joint session of the House held on 22 January.

The BJP also sought the passage of a formal resolution condemning the incident and apologising to the Governor, arguing that the dignity of a constitutional authority had been compromised inside the legislature.

In a sharp countermove, the Congress government accused Gehlot of "violating the Constitution" by refusing to read the prepared address approved by the cabinet during the joint session and instead limiting his customary speech to just three lines.

The ruling party further alleged that the Governor had "disrespected the national anthem" by walking out of the House before it was played, and demanded that he apologise to the people of the state and to the Legislative Assembly.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Speaker UT Khader, however, said he required time to examine all aspects of the issue, including available records and video footage, before delivering his ruling in the coming days.

Raising the matter in the Assembly, LoP R Ashoka told the Speaker, "Videos are showing how Congress legislators treated the governor. What would have happened if someone had attacked him? The House comes under your jurisdiction; you must give a ruling and take action."

Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil, who is responsible for the smooth conduct of proceedings, accused the Governor of "running away" from the House and abandoning established conventions.

Intervening in the debate, CM Siddaramaiah said, "The governor is the head of the State and the custodian of the Constitution. The governor disrespected the national anthem by not waiting. You shouldn't defend him." *—PTI*

Nokia eyes global capacity and R&D centres in K'taka

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Nokia Corporation has expressed interest in establishing a global capability centre and research facilities in Karnataka, Industries Minister MB Patil said on Friday. The company has held discussions with the State government on expanding its operations across the State.

Patil said the government assured full support during meetings with Nokia officials on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) summit in Davos.

He reiterated Karnataka's backing of the WEF's 'Yes–BLR UpLink' initiative, aimed at developing the 'Yes Bengaluru' programme on sustainable urban development into a globally recognised platform for government–industry collaboration. The initiative was discussed in detail with John Dutton, Head of UpLink.

Patil added that talks were held with cyber security firm Cloudflare regarding participation in the proposed 'KWIN City' project and broader expansion in Karnataka. Located between Dabaspet and Doddaballapur, KWIN City is envisioned as a sustainable ecosystem to attract global talent. Cloudflare's Global Strategy Head Stephanie Cohen described Karnataka as one of the "world's best destinations for advanced technologies."

He further said US-based Vast Space, UAE's Crescent Enterprises, and US aerospace company Voyager Technologies have expressed interest in partnering with the State. *— PTI*

Karnataka Industries Minister MB Patil during meeting with Nokia officials on the sidelines of the WEF summit in Davos ***PHOTO: X/MB PATIL***

Cops suspect short circuit as blaze rages in Hubballi mall

HUBBALLI, 23 JAN

The raging fire on Thursday gutted the fifth and fourth floors of Sukhasagar Metro Mall. Following the incident, Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner N Shashi Kumar confirmed that a massive fire broke out on the fourth floor of the Maratha Galli shopping centre, then spread to the fifth floor, engulfing nearly 5,000sq.feet on each level.

Providing more details on the incident, Shashi Kumar said, "In the Maratha Galli area, the Sukhasagar mall is a small mall of about five floors. The fire started on the 4th floor and later spread to the 5th floor, covering about 4,000-5,000 sq ft on each floor.

The cause of the fire, according to local people, seems to be a short circuit. Immediately, fire tenders came, and they tried to put out the fire. As it is on the fifth and fourth floors, about 40-50 feet high, more vehicles with larger capacities are coming from different places. Already three fire engines have installed in the centre. There hasn't been any reporting of injury or death of any individual. As of now, it seems to be damaged at one cloth centre and one furniture centre."

Firefighting teams are struggling to douse the blaze that has been raging for over three hours. *—ANI*

CANVAS COMES ALIVE

Paintings by 48 art teachers from the Gadag Art Teachers' Association kept on display in front of the Gandhi statue on the Vidhana Soudha premises in Bengaluru on Friday. The artworks will be featured in the association's annual calendar for the year 2026 ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

WITHIN 24HRS OF INCIDENT

Leopard that killed devotee captured in MM Hills

MYSURU, 23 JAN

Forest officials on Friday captured a five-year-old leopard believed to have killed a devotee in Malemahadeshwara Hills within 24 hours of the incident.

On 21 January, Praveen of Cheeranahalli in Mandya district was killed around 5.45am during a padayatra near Rangaswamy Vaddu. His body was recovered about 100metres from the site.

The Forest Department launched a large-scale operation with over 50 personnel, including wildlife experts, veterinarians, trained trackers, and drone surveillance teams. As a precaution, the district administration temporarily banned padayatra and two-wheeler movement along forest routes from 21 to 24 January.

Using drones, camera traps, cages, and ground tracking, officials tranquillised and captured the male leopard on Thursday at 9pm. Experts at Tiger Cell in Bengaluru confirmed its involvement via stripe pattern analysis and drone visuals.

The leopard has been shifted to the Chamundi Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Koorgalli for observation ***PHOTO: SALAR***

The leopard has been shifted to the Chamundi Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre in Koorgalli for observation.

Minister K Venkatesh convened an emergency meeting, instructed officials to strengthen preventive measures, and announced Rs 5 lakh compensation for Praveen's family. Deputy Conservator Bhaskar said the leopard is in good health, and officials continue to monitor forest areas for safety. *—Salar News*

Model house torched in Ballari, BJP MLA's family alleges attack

BALLARI, 23 JAN

A model house built for prospective buyers in a G Square Layout in Ballari was set ablaze on Friday, police said.

The residential layout is being developed by mining baron and BJP MLA G Janardhana Reddy and former minister B Sriramulu.

Janardhana Reddy's brother, G Somashekar Reddy, alleged that supporters of Congress MLA Nara Bharath Reddy torched the structure using petrol and diesel.

"We formed Rukmini Layout, also called G Square Layout. On Friday evening, about 15 miscreants who earlier caused a riot near Janardhana Reddy's house on January 1 brought fuel and set the model house on fire," he told reporters. He claimed fuel was poured on inflammable material before it was burnt, asserting the attackers were "100 per cent Bharath Reddy followers".

Fire tenders rushed to the spot and doused the blaze. No injuries were reported. The incident follows violent clashes over banner installation in Ballari on 1 January. *—PTI*

Forest Minister warns of forest fires as heat rises

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

Ahead of the Ratha Saptami festival, Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre on Friday urged forest and wildlife department officials to remain on high alert as rising temperatures increase the risk of forest fires. Ratha Saptami, also known as Surya Jayanti, will be observed on 25 January.

Chairing a video conference with department officials, Khandre directed the use of drone cameras for surveillance wherever available, intensified patrolling, and heightened vigilance in fire-prone and sensitive areas.

The minister also instructed officials to ensure adequate availability of fodder and drinking water for wildlife during the summer. He asked them to supply water through solar pumps connected to borewells.

Referring to festivals such as Shivaratri, Ugadi and Deepavali, a statement from his office noted that devotees of Lord Mahadeshwara traditionally undertake padayatras through forest routes to reach Male Mahadeshwara Hills. In this context, Khandre ordered the installation of drone cameras along footpaths and stairway routes.

He also directed the formation of teams comprising forest staff, home guards and local personnel to assist devotees. Officials were asked to approach the Male Mahadeshwara Hills Development Authority and the district administration to bear the required expenditure.

Devotees from Mandya, Mysuru, Bengaluru and other districts, reach Basavanakatte in Hanur, and trek through several villages to reach the shrine. With an increase in wildlife, such padayatras have become potentially risky. He instructed officials to counsel devotees sensitively and cautioned against overnight stays in forest. - Salar News

TN Assembly urges govt to continue MGNREGA

CHENNAI, 23 JAN

- Chief Minister MK Stalin highlighted that Tamil Nadu efficiently implements various initiatives, often ranking first in India, and receives appreciation from ministries.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly on Friday adopted a resolution urging the Centre to continue with the MGNREGA scheme to safeguard rural livelihoods.

The resolution was moved by Chief Minister MK Stalin. Referring to the new scheme Viksit Bharat—Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (VB-G RAM G), Stalin said, "The proposed new scheme replaces MGNREGA and is designed in a manner that undermines the livelihoods of rural people, the financial structure of states, the self-reliance of local bodies, and employment opportunities for rural women."

Stalin highlighted that Tamil Nadu efficiently implements various initiatives, often ranking first in India, and receives appreciation from ministries. He accused the Centre of not releasing funds based on project progress, describing it as a 'step-motherly' attitude. Under MGNREGA, Rs 1,026 crore for wages and Rs 1,087 crore for materials remain unreleased.

Stalin added, "The delay affects common people and farmers in Tamil Nadu." He urged the Union government to ensure demand-based funding and retain the scheme's original name, Mahatma Gandhi. *—PTI*

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin at the TN Assembly
PHOTO: X/@DIPR

Congress more Communist than Maoists: Modi

Urges Kerala to choose BJP as third alternative

T'PURAM/CHENNAI, 23 JAN

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami with PM Narendra Modi during NDA's campaignin Tamil Nadu, on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday in Kerala said the Congress had become "more Communist than Maoists and more communal than the Muslim League".

Addressing a rally in Kerala, he alleged that the Left government had stalled the next phase of the PM Awas Yojana (Urban), delayed piped drinking water projects and prevented underprivileged children from accessing modern schools under the PM SHRI scheme.

"Even the savings deposited in banks under LDF rule are not safe. The cooperative bank scam has resulted in the hard-earned money of the poor and middle class being looted," Modi alleged, claiming both the LDF and Congress were responsible. He promised that if the BJP formed the government in Kerala, every rupee of stolen money would be recovered from the "looters".

Modi said the LDF and UDF had alternated in power and driven the state into corruption, mismanagement and appeasement politics, asserting that the BJP offered a third alternative focused on development, infrastructure and job creation.

In Tamil Nadu, Modi accused the DMK of dynasty politics, corruption and misgovernance, alleging that the party functioned "only for one family."

He also accused DMK leaders of colluding with drug dealers and said crime, liquor and narcotics posed a serious threat to youth.

Particularly reaching out to women, he promised their welfare to be of top priority and promised a piped drinking water supply to every household, should the NDA win the polls. "This is Modi's guarantee," he said.

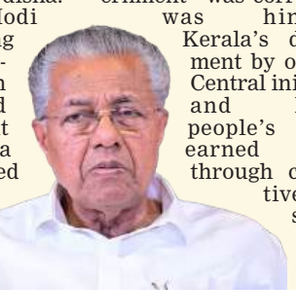
Pitching for a "double-engine" BJP-NDA government, Modi said Centre had delivered unprecedented development for Tamil Nadu over the past 11 years, including higher fund allocations and railway projects. *—PTI*

Vijayan questions PM's silence on pastor attack

T'PURAM, 23 JAN

Hitting back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's criticism of the CPI(M) and LDF government during his visit to Kerala on Friday, Chief Minister **Pinarayi Vijayan** cited an alleged brutal assault on a pastor in BJP-ruled Odisha.

Soon after Modi launched a scathing attack on LDF government, Vijayan, in a post on 'X', said "The brutal assault on a pastor in Odisha is not an isolated crime; it reflects the atmosphere of violence and hatred being systematically fostered by the Sangh Parivar. Forcing a human being to eat cow dung is a deeply inhuman act, emboldened by the silence and complicity of BJP-led governments," hesaid.



Earlier in the day, Modi alleged that the LDF government "was corrupt and was hindering Kerala's development by opposing Central initiatives and looting people's hard-earned money through cooperative bank scams." *—PTI*

Sabarimala gold case: Statutory bail granted to ex-TDB officer

KOLLAM/T'PURAM/ NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

A court here on Friday granted statutory bail to former TDB administrative officer Murari Babu in two cases related to the alleged gold loss from the Sabarimala temple.

Kollam Vigilance Court Judge Mohit CS granted bail to Babu as 90 days had elapsed since his arrest, and the Special Investigation Team had failed to file chargesheets in the two cases. Babu is the second accused in the alleged gold loss from the Dwarapalaka (guardian deity) idol plates and the sixth accused in the alleged gold loss from the doorframes of the Sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum). He will be the first person arrested in the Sabarimala gold loss cases to be released from jail.

Additionally, UDF Convenor and Congress MP Adoor Prakash on Friday admitted that he had met Potty, the prime accused in the case, on multiple occasions, but dismissed claims linking him to the case. *—PTI*

After SC order, Bhojshala sees peaceful prayers

DHAR, 23 JAN

Peace prevailed at the disputed 11th-century Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district as Hindus performed pooja to mark Basant Panchami, while Muslims offered namaz at a different location within the same premises. The puja started early in the morning under heavy security and will continue until sunset. Following Supreme Court directions, Muslims prayed between 1 and 3pm, with no incidents reported. Around 8,000 police and paramilitary personnel were deployed, and the complex was divided into six sectors, with the city into seven zones, monitored by drones and CCTV. Community members expressed happiness and gratitude for the arrangements, seeking a permanent resolution. *—PTI*

Battle continues in J'khand after 16 Maoists killed

CHAIBASA, 23 JAN

An exchange of fire between security forces and Maoists continued on Friday in the Saranda forest of the West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, a day after 16 rebels were killed in one of the State's biggest anti-Naxal operations. Among those killed was Patiram Manjhi alias Anal Da, a central committee member carrying a cumulative bounty of Rs 2.35 crore. Jharkhand had announced Rs 1 crore on him, Odisha Rs 1.2 crore and the NIA Rs 15 lakh. Five women Maoists were also killed. Around 1,500 personnel from the CRPF's CoBRA unit and the State police are involved in the operation, launched as the Centre's 31 March deadline to end Left-Wing Extremism nears. *—PTI*

Mahad violence: Sena Minister's son surrenders

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Shiv Sena Minister Bharat Gogawale's son Vikas Gogawale surrendered before the police for his role in the violence during the municipal council elections in Raigad in Maharashtra. Vikas's cousin Mahesh and six others surrendered also surrendered at the Mahad Police Station. Vikas and Mahesh had also sought pre-arrest bail pleas, but they were not granted any relief. Meanwhile, Shiv Sena corporator, Hemant Chature was allegedly beaten up by a BJP office-bearer of the BJP and his aides in Badlapur town in Thane district. *—PTI*

Upset with RaGa's Kochi 'snub', Tharoor skips poll meeting

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

- In the recent past, Tharoor's statements and articles backing Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited sharp criticism from Congress leaders at the national and state levels.

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Friday skipped a key party strategy meeting on Kerala's Assembly elections, with sources saying he was upset over repeated attempts to sideline him, including Rahul Gandhi's failure to acknowledge him at a Kochi event.

According to sources, the immediate trigger was the 'Maha Panchayath' in Kochi on 19 January, organised to felicitate local body poll winners. Gandhi named several senior leaders present on the dais but did not mention Tharoor, a four-time MP and one of Kerala's three Congress Working Committee members, despite his presence on stage.

Tharoor's office said he had informed the party of his inability to attend the meeting due to prior commitments at the Kerala Literature Festival in Kozhikode. However, sources close to him said he was deeply hurt by the treatment, particularly after differences were believed to have been resolved during Wayanad meetings held alongside the Lakshya 2026 leadership camp.

Following that conclave, Tharoor had publicly stated that he had never deviated from the party line. There was no official response from the Congress.

Kerala Congress leaders had projected unity against the Left Democratic Front, with an understanding that Tharoor would not contest the elections but campaign across the State. However, sources said tensions have resurfaced after the Kochi episode.

In the recent past, Tharoor's statements and articles backing Prime Minister Narendra Modi had invited sharp criticism from Congress leaders at the national and state levels. *—PTI*

Assam voters 'dead' & 'shifted' in revised rolls

GUWAHATI/MORIGAON/ NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

> More than 110 people have already died; everyday three to four people are dying by suicide out of SIR anxiety... 40 to 45 more people are fighting for their lives in hospitals.
>
> -Mamata Banerjee, WB Chief Minister

Faridud Eunush's household has six voters in Assam's Morigaon, but three of them have been shown as having 'shifted' from their address during the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) exercise.

Eunush and his siblings attended a hearing on 22 January with documents to prove they still reside in Mikirbheta circle of Morigaon Assembly constituency.

"The electoral registration officer (ERO) refused to tell who had filed the complaint against us. He said we would have to file an RTI application to know the complainant's name, which we submitted immediately," Eunush claimed.

Like Eunush and his siblings, thousands across the state have reportedly received notices based on applications filed through Form 7, which deals with proposed inclusion or deletion of names from the existing electoral rolls.

Many claimed that they received notices which showed them as marked 'death' even as they were alive.

A state EC official said that instances have come to light where the same complainant has filed applications for deletions of names of several persons in the same constituency.

The final electoral rolls will be published on 10 February.

Meanwhile , TMC MP Sushmita Dev on Friday wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, raising "serious concerns" over the ongoing Special Revision of Electoral Rolls in Assam. *—PTI*

Bhujbal cleared in Maharashtra Sadan money laundering case

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

A Mumbai court on Friday discharged NCP Minister **Chhagan Bhujbal** in a money laundering case linked to the construction of Maharashtra Sadan in New Delhi.

The decision has brought relief to the senior leader after years of legal scrutiny.

The case stems from a 2005–2006 contract awarded when Bhujbal was Public Works Department minister of Maharashtra. The Enforcement Directorate had alleged that Bhujbal and his family received kickbacks from construction firm KS Chamankar, which built Maharashtra Sadan.

Investigators claimed funds were routed to companies where Bhujbal's son Pankaj and nephew Sameer Bhujbal served as directors.

Special PMLA Judge Satyanarayan Ramjivan Navandar accepted Bhujbal's discharge plea, along with those of other accused, a lawyer said. ED's case was based on an FIR filed by the Anti-Corruption Bureau against Bhujbal and his relatives.

According to investigators, the project's original cost estimate of Rs 13.5 crore was later revised to Rs 50 crore. The agency alleged Bhujbal received Rs 13.5 crore as kickbacks, while the construction firm earned profits of about Rs 190 crore from Maharashtra Sadan and other PWD projects.

Bhujbal, his son, nephew and five others had earlier been discharged in the related Anti-Corruption Bureau case in 2021, strengthening his defence in the money laundering proceedings. *—PTI*

Flexible political stance not for selfish gains: Raj Thackeray

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

MNS Chief Raj Thackeray on Friday said that his taking a slightly flexible stance in the transformed politic will never be for personal gain. His statement comes after five corporators of his party extended support to the Shinde-led Shiv Sena in KDMC in Thane district. Recalling his deep bond with his uncle and Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray, Raj said that being unable to meet him frequently was very painful. Meanhwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav said Shiv Sena should support Uddhav Thackeray's party candidate instead of BJP in BMC mayoral election. *—PTI*

THREAT TO WILDLIFE

Fadnavis ignores panel, gives nod to mining in tiger corridor

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Despite protests from its own expert committee, the Devendra Fadnavis-led State Board for Wildlife approved an iron ore mining project inside a critical tiger corridor connecting the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, one of India's largest national parks, according to The Quint's report.

The approval came despite a detailed committee report warning that "any mining in this forest will cause irreversible damage to the environment and wildlife". The project, proposed by Sunflag Iron and Steel Company near Lohardongri village in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, involves diverting 35.95 hectares of Reserved Forest land.

The panel cautioned that mining would cause large-scale tree loss, habitat fragmentation, pollution, and a rise in human–tiger conflict in a region already witnessing fatalities. In 2025 alone, Chandrapur district recorded 47 human deaths from tiger attacks, including 18 in the Brahmapuri division.

Devendra Fadnavis **PHOTO: PTI**

Environmentalists said the mine lies within a vital corridor connecting Tadoba to the Brahmapuri–Gadchiroli landscape. "Every recommendation of the committee opposed the project. How can the government override its own experts?" asked environmentalist Bandu Dhotre.

The mine promises 120 jobs, only 32 permanent, which the panel said was insignificant compared to ecological costs. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray has urged Centre to reject the proposal at the National Board for Wildlife stage official. *—Agencies*

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT SNAPSHOT

18,000 trees to be cut

- **35.95** hectares of forest diverted
- 650 villages exposed to conflict
- 120 jobs, only **32 permanent**

RaGa says tariffs hurting textile sector, asks PM to act

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Asserting that US tariffs are hurting textile exporters, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said that India must secure a trade deal with America that puts Indian businesses and workers first.

He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi must not allow his "own weakness" to impact the economy any further.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha shared a video on X of his recent visit to a garment factory in Haryana where he witnessed the skill of Indian tailors and the resilience and ambition of people.

"With 50 per cent tariffs in the US, falling prices in Europe, and fierce competition from Bangladesh and China, our garment and textile exporters are facing pressure from all sides," he said.

Meanwhile, Union Textile Minister Giriraj Singh claimed that textile exports increased to Rs 1.02 lakh crore during April-December 2025 and 5 crore jobs were created in the sector in the last 11 years.

Singh asked Gandhi to stop misleading the country. *—PTI*

PHOTO: AI

Andhra panel to study social media ban for teens

AMARAVATI, 23 JAN

The possibility of restricting or banning children below 16 years of age is one of the aspects which will be explored by a committee appointed by the Andhra Pradesh government to review existing laws, rules and guidelines applicable to online platforms, State Home Minister Vangalapudi Anitha said on Friday.

The panel, comprising a Group of Ministers (GoM), was constituted in October 2025 and will submit its report in a month's time, she said. The minister said the GoM headed by IT Minister Nara Lokesh and comprising members, including herself, Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav & others, will study models being followed by various state governments and countries so that the best model can be adopted.

Australian recently brought out legislation that would set an age limit of 16 years for children to start using social media, & hold platforms responsible for ensuring compliance. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Ravi Pujari held for extortion bid on Remo D'Souza

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The Mumbai police have arrested gangster Ravi Pujari in connection with a 2018 case involving an attempt to extort Rs 50 lakh from choreographer Remo D'Souza and his wife. The crime branch's anti-extortion cell (AEC) took Pujari from Bengaluru prison and presented him in court on Thursday. He remains in police custody until 27 January. Pujari, 56, with 49 cases across Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, and Karnataka, threatened D'Souza over a financial dispute. The case is one of nine pending against him, with some under the Maharashtra Control Organised Crime Act. —*ANI*

Chhattisgarh steel plant kiln sealed for safety lapses

RAIPUR, 23 JAN

The Chhattisgarh government has sealed one of the kilns at a steel plant in Balodabazar-Bhatapara district, where an explosion killed six workers, over violations of safety norms. Workers, most hailing from Bihar and Jharkhand were killed in the blast that occurred at Real Ispat and Power Ltd in Bakulahi village on 22 January. The blast injured five others too. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the next of kin of the deceased and Rs 50,000 to the injured.—*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

IAF's Sarang team to perform at Singapore Airshow

SINGAPORE, 23 JAN

The Indian Air Force's Sarang helicopter display team will perform at the Singapore Airshow 2026, organisers announced. The team said on social media, "Singapore, we've arrived! The Sarang Helicopter Display Team is gearing up for breathtaking manoeuvres at the Singapore Airshow 2026." The event, from 3-9 February at Changi Exhibition Centre, will also feature the Indonesian Jupiter team and China's Bayi aerobatic team. The show includes eight aerial displays, a static aircraft display, and the debut of the Australian F-35A Lightning II. The event celebrates cutting-edge military and commercial aviation technology. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

S-400 battery to debut in Delhi R-Day Parade

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The S-400 air defence system, credited with downing multiple Pakistani aircraft, will be showcased for the first time at the Republic Day parade's Department of Military Affairs tableau. Air Commodore Manish Sabharwal said, "The S-400 systems were successfully used to bring down multiple Pakistani fighter and spy planes during Operation Sindoor." The system reportedly shot down five to six Pakistani fighter jets and one spy plane over 300km inside Pakistan during the conflict. The parade's theme highlights joint military operations, with 6,050 personnel and 30 tableaux, including 17 from states and Union Territories. —*PTI*

SC notice to Centre, TN on ASI temple takeover

Hindus want ASI to take over Thirupparankundram shrine

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Supreme Court sought a response from the Centre, the Tamil Nadu government and others on a plea seeking directions on the ASI's takeover of the Thirupparankundram Temple and daily lamp lighting on top of the 'deepathoon' (stone pillar).

A bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and Vipul M Pancholi issued notices to the Union of India, the Tamil Nadu government, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and others on Friday. The court was informed that the Madras HC had upheld the order on lighting the lamp on 6 January.

The SC was hearing a plea filed by Hindu Dharma Parishad seeking directions that the ASI take control of the Thirupparankundram Lord Murugan Subramaniya Temple at Madurai and the lighting of the lamp on top of the 'deepathoon' at all times.

The plea also sought directions that every year on the day of Karthigai in the month of Karthigai, the entire hill be lit with lamps and devotees ngallowed to worship. On 6 January, the HC had upheld an order allowing lamp lighting on the Thirupparankundram Hill. Justices G Jayachandran and K K Ramakrishnan delivered the judgment, saying that the spot on which the stone pillar is located belongs to the Sri Subramania Swamy Temple. — *PTI*

A lamp lit at Thiruparankundram temple during the 'Karthigai Deepam' festival in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu **PHOTO: PTI**

SC asks lawyer to apologise to HC

The SC on Friday asked a Jharkhand lawyer to apologise to the HC in a suo-motu contempt case based on a court-room exchange where he told a judge, "Don't cross limits." A bench comprising CJI Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi allowed Mahesh Tiwari to file an unconditional apology before the HC bench which had issued a contempt notice against him last October. Advocate Siddharth Dave submitted that the petitioner is prepared to apologise unconditionally. — PTI

JAIRAM RAMESH CHALLENGES ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCES

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Friday said he has filed a petition in the SC challenging ex post facto environmental clearances, asserting that they are detrimental to the public. He said they give an easy way out to those who are actually wilful defaulters. Ignorance of the law cannot be an excuse for violating it, he added on X. Last month, he had urged the SC to take suo motu cognisance of three "urgent" environment matters. — PTI

PARITY CLAUSE INVOKED

Bombay HC grants bail to 2 in Elgar Parishad case

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The Bombay High Court on Friday granted bail to activists Sagar Gorkhe and Ramesh Gaichor, accused in the Elgar Parishad Maoist link case, on the grounds of parity, noting that other accused have been granted similar relief.

Gorkhe and Gaichor were arrested in September 2020 and are lodged at the Taloja prison. The duo is accused of being active members of the banned CPI (Maoist) group.

A bench, headed by Justice A S Gadkari, noted that several other accused in the case have been granted bail on the grounds of long incarceration and as the trial is not likely to commence in the near future.

The duo has been directed to furnish a bail bond of Rs 1 lakh each and go to the NIA office once a month.

At least 16 people, including prominent lawyers, activists, and academics, were booked in connection with alleged provocative speeches that were delivered at the Elgar Parishad conclave held in Pune on 31 December 2017.

Police said the speeches triggered violence at Koregaon-Bhima, on the outskirts of Pune, the next day.

The Pune police, which initially probed the case, claimed that Maoists had backed the conclave. The NIA later took over the probe into the case.

Father Stan Swamy, an 84-year-old priest and tribal rights activist, died while in custody in July 2021, awaiting trial. — *PTI*

- Gorkhe and Gaichor were arrested in September 2020 and are at the Taloja prison. The duo is accused of being members of the banned CPI (Maoist) group.

The trial court will reconsider the bail plea on 23 January **PHOTO: PTI**

Turkman Gate violence case accused loses bail

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Delhi High Court has set aside the bail granted to an accused, who was allegedly part of the mob that engaged in stone-pelting during a demolition near the Faiz-e-Elahi mosque in Turkman Gate here early this month.

Remanding the case to the trial court for reconsideration, Justice Prateek Jalan said while the court was extremely cautious in interfering with liberty granted to an individual, this was an "exceptional" case where bail was granted to Ubedullah, a street vendor, through a "cryptic and unreasoned" order.

The trial court had granted bail to Ubedullah on 20 January.

Justice Jalan said the bail order did not address the arguments of the prosecution.

The impugned order is set aside for want of adequate reasons and remanded to the sessions court, the court said in its order on 21 January. The trial court will reconsider the bail plea on 23 January.

The prosecution had relied on CCTV footage and the disclosure of a co-accused alleging that Ubedullah was part of a violent crowd that blocked the police, engaged in stone-pelting and damaged public property to oppose bail before the trial court.

The counsel for the accused had, however, said the entire case against him was "a 'fishing expedition'.

The case pertains to violence during an anti-encroachment drive near the mosque in the Ramlila Maidan area on 6 January night. — *PTI*

ED conducts raids in 3 states in Goa nightclub fire case

PANAJI/NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate conducted raids in Goa, Delhi and Haryana on Friday after it filed a money laundering case against the owners of a Goa-based nightclub where 25 people were killed in a fire last December, officials said.

The offices and residences of brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra and co-owner Ajay Gupta at the Kingsway Camp in New Delhi and Tatvam Villas in Gurugram (Haryana), the house of former sarpanch of Arpora-Nagoa, Roshan Redkar, and panchayat secretary Raghuvir Bagkar in Goa are being searched. Some documents were seized by the investigators. Redkar and Bagkar are alleged to have issued illegal trade licences and NOCs for the club.

ED officials went also to the premises of one Surinder Kumar Khosla, a British national, and also one of the owners of the club, to examine the money laundering angle arising from the illegal conversion of salt pan land on which the club was located. The Goa Police has issued a Red Notice through Interpol against Khosla. — *PTI*

Indigo flight, schools in Noida & Ahmedabad get bomb threats

NOIDA/AHMEDABAD/PUNE, 23 JAN

Several schools in Noida and Ahmedabad, and an IndiGo flight from Delhi to Pune, received bomb threats on Friday, triggering security checks. Te threats were found to be a hoax later.

Nearly a dozen schools in Ahmedabad received anonymous emails threatening bomb blasts on Friday, prompting police to conduct a thorough search. But nothing suspicious was found.

The DPS, Army School, and Mahatma Gandhi International School received emails threatening blasts, warning them against hoisting the tricolour on Republic Day and calling Prime Minister Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah "enemies of Khalistan."

IndiGo flight 6E 2608 from Delhi to Pune received a bomb threat upon arrival at the airport here on Thursday, although nothing suspicious was detected. The aircraft was thoroughly checked by the Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad (BDDS), the official said, adding no suspicious findings were detected.

Around 20 private schools in Noida received threat emails on Friday, prompting security checks. Senior officers, personnel from various police stations, bomb disposal squads, fire services, dog squads and BDDS (bomb detection and disposal squad) teams rushed to the schools.

Intensive checks were carried out at the premises of some private institutions, while a cyber-team began technical analysis of the emails.

Investigations are ongoing to trace the source of the emails and determine intent. — *PTI*

The bomb squad searches the Vishva Bharati School in Noida after a bomb threat received via email **PHOTO: PTI**

- The DPS, Army School and the Mahatma Gandhi International School received bombing threats, warning them against hoisting the tricolour on R-Day

Humanoid robot 'ASC Arjun' deployed at the Vizag rail station. It can recognise faces, analyse crowd density, make announcements in English, Hindi and Telugu and patrol platforms **PHOTO: EAST COAST RAILWAY**

Lankan Navy arrests 7 Indian fishermen

COLOMBO, 23 JAN

The Sri Lankan Navy arrested seven Indian fishermen for allegedly fishing in the nation's territorial waters.

The fishermen were arrested and their two trawlers were seized on Tuesday off Kovilan, in the Jaffna peninsula, the Navy said in a statement.

Those arrested will be handed over to the Fisheries Inspector of Myliddy, Jaffna, for legal proceedings, it said.

Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters.

The fishermen issue is a contentious one in the ties between India and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats for entering Sri Lankan waters.

The Palk Strait separating Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka is a rich fishing ground. In 2025, the Lankan Navy apprehended 346 Indian fishermen and seized 44 trawlers, according to the statement. — *PTI*

Moon mission: Sunita says she will have 'FOMO'

KOZHIKODE, 23 JAN

Retired NASA astronaut Sunita Williams says even her 608 days in orbit cannot quell her 'FOMO' (fear of missing out) linked to the coming Artemis Moon mission.

Speaking at the Kerala Literature Festival (KLF) on Thursday, a half-moon shimmering over the water, Williams reflected on her 27-year career, the awe of seeing Earth from orbit, teamwork on the ISS, and the simple joys she missed in space.

"Who doesn't want to go to the Moon... That was the whole reason I wanted to join NASA. So yes, I will have FOMO, but I am excited to see my friends take this step," she said. NASA's Artemis II, the first crewed Moon mission since 1972, will orbit the Moon in 2026 with four astronauts.

Williams, 60, logged 608 days in space, completing nine spacewalks totalling 62 hours, ranking most among women and fourth overall. She shares the sixth-longest single American spaceflight of 286 days with Butch Wilmore.

Born to a Gujarati father and Slovenian mother, Williams expressed gratitude for India embracing her as "its daughter." She also praised Earth's simple joys such as rain, wind, sand, and her dogs. — *PTI*

JAIL ROMANCE

Two convicts serving lifers to get married in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, 23 JAN

Two murder convicts serving lifers fell in love in Jaipur's open-air prison, and are getting married on Friday.

Priya Seth, 34, is in jail for trapping a guy on a dating app, strangling him and stuffing his body in a suitcase. Hanuman Prasad, 29, conspired with a woman and killed her husband and kids.

They fell in love and decided to get married. They have been granted a 15-day parole.

The parole was granted after the Rajasthan HC on 7 January directed the parole committee to decide their applications within seven days.

Priya Seth and Hanuman Prasad **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

The wedding is scheduled at Barodameo in Alwar district. Sources said the two are living in the open-air prison, where inmates are permitted to work outside during the day and return by evening.

Seth was convicted in the 2018 Jaipur murder of Dushyant Sharma, 27, whose body was found stuffed inside a suitcase. Police said she had met the victim through a dating app, held him captive at her rented flat in Bajaj Nagar and killed him. She was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2023.

Prasad was found guilty in a 2017 murder case in Alwar involving the killing of a man, his three sons and a nephew. Police said he had a relationship with the man's wife, Santosh Sharma.

Sandeep Loharia, counsel for the victim's family in the Dushyant Sharma case, said they would challenge the parole. — *PTI*

Youth amputates foot to get admission to MBBS

JAUNPUR, 23 JAN

A youth from Uttar Pradesh amputated his foot to become eligible for the NEET disability quota.

Suraj Bhaskar, around 20, had twice failed NEET, and he claimed that he lost a foot in an attack, police said.

The police are seeking legal opinion to determine what legal sections could be levelled against him.

The matter came to light after the hopeful's elder brother, Akash Bhaskar, informed the police on Sunday that "assailants" allegedly assaulted Suraj the previous night, leaving him unconscious with a severed foot before fleeing.

A case was registered which was later handed over to City Circle Officer Goldy Gupta, he said.

Police found several inconsistencies in Suraj's statement. Examination of his phone and the questioning of a woman deepened suspicion.

Line Bazar Station House Officer Satish Singh said Suraj is undergoing treatment at a private hospital. — *PTI*

Suraj Bhaskar **PHOTO: X/ ASKANSHUL**

BLESSED BEGINNINGS

Over one crore devotees took a holy dip at the Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Basant Panchami, which marks the arrival of spring. Meanwhile, worshippers in Kolkata visited the Sirity Bidyabitan Temple for Saraswati Puja. Dedicated to the goddess of knowledge, the festivals see students, artists and musicians place their books, pens and musical instruments near the idol to seek blessings
PHOTO: PTI

Pollution hurts India more than tariffs: Gita Gopinath

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Harvard economist and former IMF chief Gita Gopinath had a stark warning for India: Pollution is a much bigger threat than tariffs. With pollution killing 1.7 million Indians every day, it is an economic emergency and a deterrent for investments. She also warned that in case of a full-fledged tariff war, diversion of exports will only be a temporary relief.

Former IMF chief Gita Gopinath at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

EXCERPTS:
Without a doubt, India will become the third largest economy of the world. It's a matter of a few years unless something catastrophic happens. Based on current projections, India gets there by 2028.

The challenge for India is not this. The challenge for India is about raising per capita incomes to higher levels. I agree with the minister (IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav) that substantial reforms have been undertaken. The physical infrastructure buildout is impressive. The digital infrastructure buildout is impressive.

LAND ACQUISITION A SETBACK
It is a tremendous challenge in India to acquire land to have clean land titles and that is a constraint on growth. It's a constraint on manufacturing. Again, there are states in India experimenting with techniques that other states can also adopt. I think Andhra Pradesh is doing a good job in finding creative ways of helping with selling of land, shifting land from being agricultural to commercial land. Judicial reforms I think are absolutely critical.

ON LABOUR FORCE
If you look at the contribution of labour to growth in India since the 1980s, only about 30 per cent of India's growth has come from labour. So it is a fairly capital-intensive production structure that India has because of the rules and regulations that exist and the complications of hiring labour. It is a very positive step in terms of implementing the labour laws that were passed by Parliament. The states need to take that and go ahead.

CURBING POLLUTION SHOULD BE INDIA'S TOP MISSION
Pollution is a challenge in India. And if you look at the impact of pollution on the Indian economy, it is far more consequential than any impact of any tariffs that have been put on India so far. If you look at the annual cost to India's GDP of the level of pollution that you have and it's not just the effect on economic activity, but it's also the loss in lives. Based on a World Bank study I think in 2022, about 1.7 million lives are lost every year in India because of pollution. That's 18 per cent of the deaths in India. I think even from any international investor's perspective who's thinking of coming in and putting up a shop in India, if you have to live there... this is going to be consequential. It holds you back and obviously, not to say about all the Indians that are living in in in this kind of pollution. So addressing that on a war footing is critical. I mean this has to be a top mission for India.

On tariffs
One of the reasons that the tariffs that have been announced so far from the US has not been hugely consequential on the world is because the actual level of tariffs. The actual level of tariffs is a fraction of the headline numbers, so the statutory rate is about 24 per cent, the actual rate is about 14 per cent because there are so many exemptions and so many carveouts. So every time I hear a number, I'm like I want to wait and see exactly where something sticks.

NEW WORLD ORDER
We have permanently moved away from the previous last 80 years of the global economic order. It doesn't matter what comes next, but we're not going back to when we had completely close to free trade. I think national security considerations, economic security considerations have become important for good reason. More countries are going to be looking inwards and building up their own shop is important for their security.

What we saw in 2025 was that almost every country in the world found a different market to sell their goods to or found a different market through which their goods went back to the US. I honestly don't think that's a sustainable strategy. India can have 36 per cent tariff and somehow India would find new markets to send their goods to. There is going to be retaliation. Europe will retaliate to all the flood of goods coming from China. Other countries will too. Maybe India will be concerned about this a point, so it's not a viable strategy.

But what is a viable strategy is indeed having more trade agreements with other countries which India is doing right now, European Union is doing with Latin America.

JUST 26% OF INDIA'S LABOUR EXPOSED TO AI
India does have good digital infrastructure which it continues to build on. It has a lot of skilled engineers and an IT sector that supplies the world. But we have to find ways of coming up with new kinds of jobs

If you look at the statistics about how much of India's labour force is exposed to AI, it's about 26 per cent. The average for the world is 40 per cent. That's just a reflection of the fact that still a very large number of Indians work in agriculture. So that transition has still not happened. Productivity in agriculture has not gone up enough to push people out of agriculture into industry and into services. If we end up with services also becoming capital intensive in India, then there is going to be a problem with enough job creation. Here labour market flexibility is again super important —*Salar News*

LETTERS

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SALAR ساہ

In North India, snow & rains bring joy to farmers, tourists

Snow and rain. Dark skies over North India wrote in both on Friday, the snow painting the hills a picture postcard white while steady rain disrupted life across the plains, including in Delhi where the full dress Republic Day rehearsal went ahead despite the weather odds.

Temperatures plummeted as the prolonged dry spell finally ended in the region with the unseasonal snow and rainfall. It led to sighs of relief from farmers in many and whoops of delight from tourists in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir preparing for a long holiday weekend.

Fresh snowfall in most parts of Jammu and Kashmir led to the closure of the Srinagar-Jammu national highway, suspension of Mata Vaishno Devi yatra and cancellation of over 20 flights in Kashmir.

Gulmarg received over two feet of fresh snow, while the Sonamarg in Ganderbal district recorded over six inches, and the Pahalgam resort in south Kashmir's Anantnag district around three inches, they said.

Moderate to heavy snowfall was recorded in many areas in Budgam, Baramulla, Kupwara Shopian, Pulwama, and Bandipora districts, while Anantnag and Kulgam districts received light to moderate snow, they added.

The air traffic to and fro Kashmir was suspended on Friday after flight operations were cancelled at the Srinagar airport due to heavy snowfall in the valley, which has rendered the runway unsafe for aircraft operation, officials said.

The Mughal Road, the alternate route connecting the valley with Jammu region, was also shut, while the Srinagar-Leh national highway was also closed for traffic due to snowfall in Sonamarg and Zojila Axis.

There is a possibility of heavy rain or snow with gusty winds or hailstorm over a few districts of Pir-Panjal range, Chenab valley and south Kashmir.

High-speed winds swept many places in the valley, including Srinagar, last night, uprooting trees, electricity poles, and rooftops in few areas, while also snapping power lines, the officials said.

In Jammu, schools in Rajouri, Poonch and Kathua districts were closed after snowfall was experienced in the high altitude areas. Moderate rains lashed the plains, including Jammu city, bringing an end to a dry spell that had lasted for over two months.

In Delhi, a long spell of dry winter weather finally ended when the city recorded its first rain of the year, bringing a brief relief from high pollution levels in the city.

A resident clears snow following heavy snowfall across South Kashmir's Shopian district on Friday ***PHOTO: PTI***

The showers led to a significant shift in air quality as Delhi's AQI stood at 293 in the "poor" category, according to the CPCB's Sameer app, an improvement from 313 recorded at 4 pm on Thursday.

While soldiers marched along the Kartavya Path in soaked uniforms and boots for full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade, office goers battled cold and congestion when peak-hour rain brought the city to its knees.

People who came to watch the rehearsal remained seated even as the rain continued. Many used umbrellas, caps and plastic sheets to protect themselves, while others adjusted their seating and belongings as the rain passed.

Following a steady rainfall, traffic crawled in parts of the city. While some commuters shared pictures of long jams on X, with captions, "Light rain, heavy drama - peak Delhi behaviour", "Delhi traffic sucks!"

Himachal Pradesh on Friday received its first snowfall of this winter, ending a nearly three-month-long dry spell and bringing cheers to the tourists and turning the hill state into a winter wonderland.

Tourists seen enjoying the snow at famous tourist spots. Some users on X, posting videos of the fresh snowfall, suggested tourists to drive slowly on the road.

"I've seen snowfall for the first time in Manali. It is an amazing experience," a tourist from Una said.

The MeT has predicted that the higher reaches of the state will continue to receive snowfall till January 24, while other areas are expected to remain dry.

Snowfall in higher reaches and rain in low-lying areas of Uttarakhand ended a long dry spell and intensified the cold wave.

Fresh snowfall covered Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Auli, Mussoorie, Chakrata, Dhanaulti and Uttarkashi in a thick layer of white.

The change in weather has drawn tourists to various spots, including the Mall Road and other spots in Mussoorie, with many posting videos of the snowfall on social media. Apple growers and other horticulturists, who had been waiting for the precipitation also welcomed the snowfall. In Rajasthan, rainfall under the influence of a fresh western disturbance was recorded in several parts, including Jaipur. Pushkar in the Ajmer district recorded the highest rainfall at 13.0 mm. Light to moderate fog was also reported at a few places.

A prolonged dry spell also ended in Punjab and Haryana, as the two states witnessed rainfall on Friday, leading to a rise in minimum temperatures, hovering above normal limits. . —*PTI*

US completes withdrawal from WHO but owes it $130 million

The US has finalised its withdrawal from the World Health Organisation, one year after President Donald Trump announced America was ending its 78-year-old commitment, federal officials said Thursday.

BUT IT'S HARDLY A CLEAN BREAK
The US owes more than USD 130 million to the global health agency, according to WHO. And Trump administration officials acknowledge that they haven't finished working out some issues, such as lost access to data from other countries that could give America an early warning of a new pandemic.

The withdrawal will hurt the global response to new outbreaks and will hobble the ability of US scientists and pharmaceutical companies to develop vaccines and medicines against new threats, said Lawrence Gostin, a public health law expert at Georgetown University.

"In my opinion, it's the most ruinous presidential decision in my lifetime," he said.

The WHO is the United Nations' specialised health agency and is mandated to coordinate the response to global health threats, such as outbreaks of mpox, Ebola and polio.

It also provides technical assistance to poorer countries; helps distribute scarce vaccines, supplies and treatments; and sets guidelines for hundreds of health conditions, including mental health and cancer.

Nearly every country in the world is a member.

US still owes money, WHO says
The US is legally required to give notice one year in advance of withdrawal — which it did — but also to pay any outstanding financial obligations.

The US has not paid any of its dues for 2024 and 2025, leaving a balance of more than USD 133 million, according to WHO.

An administration official denied that requirement Thursday, saying the US had no obligation to pay prior to withdrawing as a member.

Trump cited Covid-19 in pulling US from WHO

US officials helped lead the WHO's creation, and America has long been among the organisation's biggest donors, providing hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of staffers with specialised public health expertise.

On average, the US pays USD 111 million a year in member dues to the WHO and roughly USD 570 million more in annual voluntary contributions, according to the US Department of Health and Human Services.

The withdrawal will hurt the global response to new outbreaks and will hobble the ability of US scientists and pharmaceutical companies to develop vaccines and medicines against new threats ***PHOTO: AI***

In an executive order issued right after taking office, Trump said the US was withdrawing from WHO due to the organisation's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global health crises.

He also cited the agency's "failure to adopt urgently needed reforms" and its "inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states."

WHO, like other public health organisations, made costly mistakes during the pandemic, including at one point advising people against wearing masks. It also asserted that Covid-19 wasn't airborne, a stance it didn't officially reverse until 2024.

Another Trump administration complaint: None of WHO's chief executives — there have been nine since the organisation was created in 1948 — have been Americans. Administration officials view that as unfair given how much the WHO relies on US financial contributions and on US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention personnel.

Public health experts say US exit will hobble responses to threats

Experts say the US exit could cripple numerous global health initiatives, including the effort to eradicate polio, maternal and child health programmes, and research to identify new viral threats. Dr Ronald Nahass, president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, called the US withdrawal "shortsighted and misguided" and "scientifically reckless."

The US has ceased official participation in WHO-sponsored committees, leadership bodies, governance structures and technical working groups. That would seem to include the WHO group that assesses what flu strains are circulating and makes critical decisions about updating flu shots.

It also signals the US is no longer participating in global flu information-sharing that guides vaccine decisions.

Such disease intelligence has helped Americans be "at the front of the line" when new outbreaks occur and new vaccines and medicines are quickly needed to counteract them and save lives, Gostin said.

Trump administration officials say they already have public health relationships with many countries and are working to ensure direct sharing of that kind of information, rather than having WHO serve as a middleman. But US officials did not give specifics about how many such arrangements are in place. Gostin, an expert on international public health treaties and collaborations, said it's unlikely the US will reach agreements with more than a couple dozen countries.

Many emerging viruses are first spotted in China, but "is China going to sign a contract with the United States?" Gostin said. "Are countries in Africa going to do it? Are the countries Trump has slapped with a huge tariff going to send us their data? The claim is almost laughable."

Gostin also believes Trump overstepped his authority in pulling out of WHO. The US joined the organisation through an act of Congress and it is supposed to take an act of Congress to withdraw, he argued. —*PTI*

US, Russia, Ukraine meet to end war

US-Ukraine-Russia trilateral talks will begin on Friday

MOSCOW, 23 JAN

US President Donald Trump's envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner met with Russian President Vladimir Putin for an overnight talk on Friday to discuss territorial disputes between Ukraine and Russia.

The Kremlin meeting aimed to establish the framework for a potential peace deal to end the nearly four-year conflict.

Reflecting the ongoing unresolved contention over Russia's demand for Ukrainian forces to retreat from eastern regions that Russia has claimed, Kremlin foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov, who was also involved in the late-night meeting, noted that the peace deal framework remains out of reach until territorial disputes are resolved.

TRUMP MEETS ZELENSKYY

Trump's envoys briefed Putin on Trump's closed-door meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos on Thursday, where Zelenskyy criticised European allies for a weak response to Russia's full-scale invasion.

Russia's larger military has seized about 20 per cent of Ukraine since fighting began in 2014, including the 2022 full-scale invasion, but at high cost, with Moscow's economy strained by the war and sanctions.

GROUNDHOG DAY

Speaking at WEF on Thursday, Zelenskyy compared the current state of the conflict to the film 'Groundhog Day', in which the protagonist is forced to relive the same day repeatedly.

"Just last year, here in Davos, I ended my speech with the words: Europe needs to know how to defend itself," Zelenskyy said. "A year has passed. And nothing has changed."

TRILATERAL TALKS

Zelenskyy said two days of US-Ukraine-Russia trilateral talks will begin Friday in the United Arab Emirates. Ushakov confirmed Russia's participation.

This will be the first trilateral diplomatic engagement since the war began in 2022.

The talks will be at a technical level, not attended by any heads of state. Russia's delegation will be led by the Chief of military intelligence, Igor Kostyukov.

Putin's envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, will hold separate talks on economic issues with Witkoff in Abu Dhabi. —*PTI*

Donald Trump
PHOTO: PTI

Canada doesn't live because of US: Carney

WASHINGTON/SAN JUAN/ PUERTO RICO, 23 JAN

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney hit back at US President Donald Trump on Thursday for claiming "Canada lives because of the United States" at the World Economic Forum, prompting the US to withdraw Canada's invitation to join the "Board of Peace" for Gaza.

Carney's speech on Thursday followed his remarks at the forum on Tuesday in Davos, Switzerland, where he won a standing ovation for his frank assessment of a "rupture" in the US-led, rules-based global order.

The Canadian leader's speech got a rise out of Trump, telling Carney, "Canada lives because of the United States." Carney shot back, "Canada thrives because we are Canadian."

Trump took umbrage and taunted Carney during his own speech a day later. "I watched your prime minister yesterday. He wasn't so grateful," the US president said on Wednesday.

At Davos, Carney said that middle powers like Canada, which had prospered during the era of an "American hegemon," needed to realise that a new reality had set in, and that "compliance" would not shield them from major power aggression.

"Canada lives because of the United States. Remember that, Mark, the next time you make your statements." Alliances are redefined, broken, Trump said.

In Carney's speech on Thursday, aimed at a local audience, he said that Canada should serve as a model in an era of "democratic decline."

HAITI WARNED, DRUG SANCTIONS

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, the US warned the transitional council in charge of Haiti against making changes to the government there. The US Embassy on Wednesday, in a post on X, warned of 'appropriate measures' to protect the US and Haitian people's interests.

The US on Thursday sanctioned five Costa Ricans and entities for allegedly helping to transport tons of cocaine from Colombia, storing the drugs in Costa Rica, then shipping them to the US and Europe. —*Agencies*

Trump sues JPMorgan for USD 5 billion

Trump has sued banking giant JPMorgan Chase and its CEO Jamie Dimon for USD 5 billion, for debanking him and his businesses after he left office in 2021. "JPMC debanked (Trump)because it believed that the political tide favoured doing so," the lawsuit alleges. In a statement, the firm said it "regrets" that Trump sued them but insisted they did not close the accounts for political reasons. "The suit has no merit," JPMorgan officials claimed. – Agencies

Did Delcy & Don conspire against Maduro?

CARACAS, 23 JAN

Venezuela's interim president, Delcy Rodriguez, was reportedly coordinating with US President Donald Trump before president Nicolas Maduro was abducted and forcibly taken to the US, where he is facing charges and is in jail.

Rodriguez and her brother promised to cooperate with Trump and his team once Maduro was gone. Rodriguez and her brother told US and Qatari officials through intermediaries that they would welcome Maduro's departure, a report in The Guardian newspaper said.

Rodriguez communicated that 'Maduro needs to go' and that she would work with whatever is the aftermath, the report stated, citing sources. The US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, initially sceptical, came around to believe Rodriguez's promises.

Multiple sources revealed that while the Rodriguez siblings promised to assist the US once Maduro was gone, they never agreed to help the US topple him.

Venezuela's legislature, meanwhile, opened debate on Thursday on a bill to loosen state control over the their oil sector. —*Agencies*

Japan's Takaichi dissolves Parl, sets stage for snap polls

TOKYO, 23 JAN

Japan's Prime Minister **Sanae Takaichi** dissolved the lower house of Parliament on Friday, setting the stage for a 8 February snap election.

Elected in October as Japan's first female leader, Takaichi has been in office only three months but enjoys high approval ratings, giving her a chance to expand the governing coalition's slim majority.

The 465-member lower house dissolution delays a budget vote aimed at boosting the struggling economy.

Takaichi framed the early election as a chance for voters to decide her mandate. "I'm staking my career as prime minister," she said, stressing fiscal policies, military build-up, and stricter immigration as key to making Japan "strong and prosperous."

Her hardline conservative stance, including pro-Taiwan remarks, has escalated tensions with China, which has responded with economic and diplomatic measures. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has urged Japan to increase defence spending as the US and China vie for regional military supremacy.

- The 465-member lower house dissolution delays a budget vote aimed at boosting the struggling economy and soaring prices.

Takaichi faces challenges beyond international pressures. The scandal-tainted Liberal Democratic Party struggles to recover from political fund controversies, with traditional voters shifting toward emerging far-right opposition groups. —*PTI*

5,002 dead in Iran as Don says US 'armada' is enroute

DUBAI, 23 JAN

Iran's crackdown on nationwide protests has killed at least 5,002 people, activists said Friday.

The country remained under its most extensive internet blackout for over two weeks. Tensions escalated with US military movements and threats toward Israel.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency said 4,716 of the dead were demonstrators, along with 203 government-affiliated personnel, 43 children and 40 civilians.

More than 26,800 people have been detained. Iran's government has acknowledged 3,117 deaths, but has been accused in past unrest of undercounting fatalities.

The blackout, imposed on 8 January, has hampered independent verification. Authorities have also restricted domestic reporting, while state media has portrayed protesters as "rioters" backed by the United States and Israel, without evidence.

Amid rising tensions, US President Donald Trump said an American aircraft carrier group was moving toward the Middle East, likening it to an "armada". Analysts said the buildup could offer Washington military options, though Trump has avoided authorising strikes so far.

Authorities have restricted reporting, while state media has portrayed protesters as 'rioters' backed by the US and Israel ***PHOTO: X***

Iran's top prosecutor Mohammad Movahedi rejected Trump's claim that executions of 800 detainees had been halted, calling it "completely false".

The US Navy confirmed the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group was operating in the Indian Ocean, while Britain said it had deployed fighter jets to the Gulf for defensive purposes.

Separately, Iran marked the Revolutionary Guard's "Day of the Guardian" by showcasing military drones on state television.

During the broadcast, a masked security official issued a veiled threat toward Israel, declaring in Hebrew: "We are closer to you than you think." —*PTI*

Trump floats NATO Article 5 for US border security

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

US President Donald Trump suggested on Friday that NATO's Article 5 could be invoked to defend America's southern border from illegal immigrants. He posted on Truth Social that doing so would "force NATO to come here and protect our Southern Border from further Invasions of Illegal Immigrants," thus "freeing up large numbers of Border Patrol Agents for other tasks." This follows his recent speech at the World Economic Forum, where he questioned NATO's commitment to defending the US, asking if the alliance would "be there for us." NATO, a 32-member alliance formed in 1949, only invoked Article 5 once after 11 September, 2001. Trump expressed doubts about allies' support, saying, "I know them all very well, I'm not sure that they'd be there." His remarks come amid a US crackdown on illegal immigration, with border enforcement efforts intensified, including doubling Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers from 10,000 to 22,000. —*ANI*

MAKE IN AMERICA

Oracle, MGX, Silver Lake save Tik-Tok for America

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, finalised an agreement on Thursday to establish a new US-based joint venture, ending the threat of a US ban for the wildly popular short-form video platform.

The majority American-owned joint venture with global investors Silver Lake, MGX, and cloud data firm Oracle will operate under "defined safeguards to protect national security," the company said.

Under the terms of the agreement, the new entity will focus heavily on data protection. All American user data will be stored locally through Oracle.

Crucially, the joint venture will take control of TikTok's recommendation algorithm. While ByteDance will license the original code to the US entity, the "For You" feed formula will be retrained and updated exclusively using American user data to ensure complete independence from any foreign influence.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- "Who controls TikTok in the US has a lot of sway over what Americans see on the app," said Professor Anupam Chander.

"Who controls TikTok in the US has a lot of sway over what Americans see on the app," said Anupam Chander, a professor of law and technology at Georgetown University.

The agreement marks the conclusion of years of legal and political uncertainty.

In 2024, a bipartisan majority in Congress passed legislation requiring ByteDance to divest the platform or face a total US ban. TikTok briefly went dark in January 2025. Hours later, US President Donald Trump, on his first day in office, signed an executive order allowing the app to continue operating while his administration pursued a sale. —*PTI*

Nepali Congress declares Thapa as PM candidate

KATHMANDU, 23 JAN

The Nepali Congress on Friday announced that party President Gagan Thapa will run as the prime ministerial candidate for the upcoming general elections on March 5.

Thapa was elected President of the Nepali Congress (NC) earlier this month. Shortly after his leadership victory, the party formalised the move to project him as their lead candidate. The proposal to nominate Thapa, 49, was put forward by Vice President Bishwa Prakash Sharma and seconded by Vice President Pushpa Bhusal. The committee reportadly endorsed the nomination unanimously.

Earlier, former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah and former prime minister KP Sharma Oli were named prime ministerial candidates by their respective parties.

Oli and Shah are contesting from Jhapa-5. Thapa is from Sarlahi-4. —*PTI*

Authorities silenced protesters in Quetta with arrests and internet shutdown ***PHOTO: ANI***

Pakistan silences govt employees with arrests

BALOCHISTAN, 23 JAN

Dozens of government employees were taken into custody in Quetta after Pakistani authorities blocked a planned sit-in demanding the enactment of the Disparity Reduction Allowance.

The protest campaign had already disrupted routine work, with several government departments operating at reduced capacity recently.

On 19 January, the district administration blocked all entry points leading to the red zone, cutting off access for demonstrators. When protesters attempted to regroup outside the Quetta Press Club, police arrested them.

Authorities also suspended mobile internet services across Quetta and adjoining areas, drawing criticism from civil society members, who said the measure punished the city's population for a peaceful labour protest.

Balochistan Grand Alliance called for a "jail bharo" movement, calling on government employees to court arrest in protest against the state's heavy-handed response.

The alliance warned that detentions and restrictions would only intensify resistance. Defending the crackdown, officials claimed the Red Zone lockdown and internet suspension were precautionary security steps taken in light of the planned demonstration. —*ANI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

World bids farewell to fashion icon Valentino

ROME, 23 JAN

Fashion figures will join the public on Friday for Valentino's funeral at Rome's Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli e dei Martiri. After two-day public viewing on Wednesday and Thursday at Valentino foundation headquarters, the funeral marks the final tribute. Top names, including Tom Ford, Donatella Versace, Anna Wintour and Anne Hathaway, are expected to be in attendance. Valentino Garavani, who died aged 93 on Monday in Rome, was adored by royals and celebrities including Jackie Kennedy Onassis, Queen Rania and Julia Roberts. Hundreds bid farewell to the "last emperor" of Italian fashion during public viewing. Valentino's gowns graced the Oscars, worn by Julia Roberts in 2001 and Cate Blanchett in 2005. —*PTI*

Vietnam Communist Party re-elects general secretary

HANOI, 23 JAN

Vietnam's Communist Party re-elected To Lam as general secretary during the National Party Congress. The event, which involved nearly 1,600 delegates, focused on transforming Vietnam into a high-income economy by 2045, with a target of over 10 per cent annual GDP growth from 2026 to 2030. No announcement was made on whether To Lam will also become president; if he does, he would be the most powerful leader in decades, akin to Xi Jinping. The Congress confirmed 19 Politburo members and set Vietnam's political and economic direction through 2031. The gathering addressed Vietnam's future, aiming to realise its national ambitions over the next two decades. —*PTI*

ICE used 5-yr-olds detention as bait: School officials

MINNEAPOLIS, 23 JAN

A five-year-old boy from Minnesota was detained by federal agents alongside his father, with school officials describing the action as a 'bait' tactic. Liam Conejo Ramos was taken from his family's driveway in Columbia Heights on Tuesday afternoon, with officers allegedly instructing him to knock on the door to see if others were inside. Superintendent Zena Stenvik questioned, "Why detain a 5-year-old? You cannot tell me that this child is a violent criminal." The father, Adrian Conejo Arias, from Ecuador, who is in the US illegally, fled on foot, and the family has a pending asylum case. DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin stated Liam and his father are now in detention in Dilley, Texas, and the family was not ordered to leave. —*PTI*

Pentagon staffer named in leak tied to WaPo scribe

WASHINGTON, 23 JAN

A Pentagon contractor has been indicted on charges of illegally sharing classified defence information with a journalist, prompting scrutiny over press freedom. Aurelio Luis Perez-Lugones, 61, of Maryland, faces five counts of unlawfully transmitting and one of unlawfully retaining classified information, linked to the search of Washington Post reporter Hannah Natanson's home, last week. He is accused of taking printouts of classified documents from his workplace and passing them to the reporter, who contributed to at least five articles based on this material. Investigators found messages about the leaks, with Perez-Lugones saying, "I'm going quiet for a bit .... just to see if anyone starts asking any questions." The Washington Post has challenged the seizure of their reporter's devices." —*PTI*

Wages to be revised for PSU insurers, NABARD, RBI staff, pensioners

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Central government has approved wage revisions for PSU General Insurance companies and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), as well as a pension revision for retirees of the Reserve Bank of India and NABARD.

A total of 46,322 employees, 23,570 pensioners and 23,260 family pensioners will benefit from the wage revision, the finance ministry said on Friday.

Regarding the wage revision of PSU General Insurance companies, the ministry said it will be effective from 1 August, 2022. The total outgo will be to the tune of Rs 8,170.30 crore, which includes Rs 5,822.68 crore towards wage arrears under the wage revision, Rs 250.15 crore for NPS, and Rs 2097.47 crore for family pension.

The payment revision for NABARD will be effective 1 November, 2022, and would entail an additional annual wage bill of around Rs 170 crore and a total payment of arrears amounting to around Rs 510 crore.

Pension revision would result in a one-time arrear payment of Rs 50.82 crore, as well as an additional monthly outgo of Rs 3.55 crore in pension payments to 269 pensioners and 457 family pensioners at NABARD.

The government has approved the revision of pensions and family pensions for retirees of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Under the approved revision, pension and family pension shall be enhanced by 10 per cent on basic pension plus dearness relief, with effect from 1 November, 2022. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

PHOTO: X

Bank unions to go on nationwide strike on 27 Jan

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Bank employee unions have decided to go on a nationwide strike on 27 January to press their long-pending demand for a five-day work week, the United Forum of Bank Unions said. If the strike materialises, public sector banks may face disruption for three consecutive days as 25 and 26 January are holidays. Most public sector banks have already cautioned customers about possible service disruptions. UFBU said conciliation meetings held by the Chief Labour Commissioner with representatives of the Indian Banks' Association, banks, the Department of Financial Services and all nine unions failed to yield any positive outcome.Currently, bank staff get the second and fourth Saturdays off. Private banks may remain unaffected. *—PTI*

SDHI bags $227M shipbuilding order from Rederiet

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Gujarat-based Swan Defence and Heavy Industries (SDHI) has secured a USD 227 million (about Rs 2,080 crore) shipbuilding contract from Europe-based Rederiet Stenersen AS, marking a major milestone for India's maritime sector. The order involves construction of six 18,000 DWT IMO Type II chemical tankers at SDHI's Pipavav yard in Gujarat, with an option for six additional vessels. The vessels, around 150 metres long with a 23-metre beam, will be designed by Marinform AS and StoGda Ship Design & Engineering and classed by DNV. SDHI director Vivek Merchant said the deal reflects global confidence in Indian shipyards. Rederiet Stenersen AS said it followed rigorous evaluation before final contract signing. *—PTI*

Indigo shares decline nearly 4% post Q3 loss

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Shares of InterGlobe Aviation, parent company of IndiGo, declined nearly 4 per cent on the bourses on Friday after the country's largest airline reported a 78 per cent decline in December quarter net profit at Rs 549.1 crore. The stock depreciated 3.87 per cent to Rs 4,723.60 apiece on the BSE. On the NSE, InterGlobe Aviation's scrip dropped 3.79 per cent to Rs 4,722.50 apiece. The company said it took a hit of Rs 1,546.5 crore in the third quarter. This included Rs 577.2 crore due to massive flight disruptions witnessed during early December and another Rs 969.3 crore on account of the implementation of new labour laws. IndiGo was slapped with a fine of Rs 22.2 crore. *—PTI*

Sun Pharma gets nod for generic semaglutide

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries has received approval from the national drug regulator to sell a generic version of semaglutide injection for chronic weight management. The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has allowed the company to manufacture and market Semaglutide injection, a glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptor agonist indicated for chronic weight management in adults as an adjunct to a reduced-calorie diet and physical activity. The company will launch the product under the brand name, Noveltreat, after the expiry of the semaglutide patent in India, Noveltreat will be available in five dose strengths -- 0.25 mg/0.5 mL, 0.5 mg/0.5 mL, 1 mg/0.5 mL, 1.7 mg/0.75 mL, and 2.4 mg/0.75 mL, with a maintenance dose of 2.4 mg once weekly. *—PTI*

Markets tank 1% as sell-off increases

Nifty dives 0.95% while Sensex falls 0.94%

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty resumed their downward journey to end nearly 1 per cent lower on Friday, dragged by widespread sell-off and the rupee depreciating to hit a record low against the US dollar.

Besides, investors rushing to safe-haven assets from riskier assets and unabated foreign capital outflows in the absence of domestic triggers added to the gloom, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 769.67 points, or 0.94 per cent, to close at 81,537.70. During the day, the index slumped 835.55 points, or 1.01 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 81,471.82.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dived 241.25 points, or 0.95 per cent, to settle at 25,048.65. In the intraday session, it plunged 264.6 points, or 1.04 per cent, to hit a low of 25,025.30.

Among the 30 Sensex constituents, Adani Ports, Eternal, IndiGo, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finserv, Power Grid, Bharat Electronics Ltd, State Bank of India, Maruti Suzuki India, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Trent, Larsen & Toubro and Reliance Industries were the laggards.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys, Asian Paints, Tata Consultancy Services, Titan and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers.

The BSE smallcap gauge slumped 2.19 per cent, while the midcap index fell 1.56 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,549.80 crore on Thursday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth Rs 4,222.98 crore, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.03 per cent to USD 64.72 per barrel. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Adani Group stocks fall 13% amid US summons

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Shares of Adani group companies tumbled up to 13 per cent on Friday amid reports that the US Securities and Exchange Commission has sought the court's approval to serve summons to Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani over alleged fraud and a USD 265-million bribery case.

According to reports, the US SEC told a court in Brooklyn, New York, that it has been unable to secure assistance from Indian authorities in delivering the summons. Thereafter, the regulator has sought permission to serve the notices to Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani through email.

The lawsuit was filed in November 2024, accusing Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani of flouting US securities laws by making false and misleading statements related to Adani Green Energy Ltd.

The stock of the group's flagship firm, Adani Enterprises, plunged 9.38 per cent to Rs 1,891.60 apiece, Adani Power dropped 8.84 per cent to Rs 128.35, Adani Ports plunged 7.81 per cent to Rs 1,303.35, and Adani Total Gas by 7.55 per cent to Rs 507 on the BSE. Adani Ports was the biggest loser on the 30-share index.

Adani Green Energy Ltd tanked 13.20 per cent to Rs 785 after the company reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 5 crore for the December quarter 2025. This marks a 99 per cent fall from the Rs 474 crore in the previous fiscal. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ADANI.COM, CANVA

ADANI GROUP TAKES OVER IANS NEWS AGENCY

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group has taken full control of news agency (Indo-Asian News Service) IANS by purchasing the remaining 24 per cent stake for an undisclosed sum of money. AMG Media Networks Ltd, the media arm of Adani Enterprises acquired a majority 50.50 per cent stake in IANS in 2023. In 2024, AMNL acquired additional IANS shares with voting rights to 76 per cent, and nearly all non-voting shares. The acquisition extends Adani's presence across the content supply chain including publishing, broadcast and digital platforms. *—ANI*

Amazon plans fresh 14,000 corporate job cuts

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Amazon is set to begin another major round of layoffs next week, cutting about 14,000 corporate jobs, according to the sources, in what would be its second-largest workforce reduction since October 2025.

The move will take Amazon's total planned job cuts to nearly 30,000 roles, the biggest downsizing in its three-decade history.

Employees across Amazon Web Services, retail operations, Prime Video and the human resources unit, known internally as People Experience and Technology, are expected to be affected.

While the October layoffs were initially linked to the growing impact of artificial intelligence, CEO Andy Jassy later offered a different explanation. "It's not really financially driven and it's not even really AI-driven. It's culture," he said, citing bureaucracy and organisational bloat. Analysts say the shift in messaging reflects challenges in clearly articulating the restructuring strategy.

The cuts represent nearly 10 per cent of Amazon's roughly 350,000 corporate staff, but less than two per cent of its total workforce of 1.58 million.

PXT chief Beth Galetti acknowledged concerns in an internal memo, saying competitiveness requires "fewer layers and more ownership".

Amazon will offer severance, outplacement support and extended health benefits. Jassy has also enforced a strict five-day office mandate and introduced an anonymous feedback system, generating more than 1,500 submissions and hundreds of internal changes. *—Agencies*

- Employees across Amazon Web Services, retail operations, Prime Video and the human resources unit are expected to be affected by the layoffs.

GOLD REBOUNDS TO RS 1.58 L/10G, SILVER BY 3.4%

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Gold prices rebounded and jumped by Rs 1,500 to Rs 1,58,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to fresh buying by stockists amid strong global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 1,57,200 per 10 grams in the previous session, after touching an all-time high of Rs 1,59,700 per 10 grams on Wednesday.

Gold prices on Friday set a fresh record and positioned the metal for its strongest weekly performance since March 2020, driven by persistent geopolitical risks, overall US dollar weakness, and robust investment demand, Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international market, both gold and silver surged to fresh records, with spot gold breaching the USD 4,900 per ounce mark and silver crossing USD 99 per ounce for the first time.

Spot gold is trading higher at around USD 4,960 per ounce. Spot silver also gathered pace, rising 3.42 per cent, or USD 3.29, to USD 99.46 per ounce after hitting a record high of USD 99.78. *—PTI*

T'gana govt signs MoUs for investments at WEF

HYDERABAD, 23 JAN

The Telangana delegation, led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, engaged with global business leaders during the WEF annual meeting in Davos, signing MoUs to attract significant investments, the state government announced. The objective of showcasing the 'Telangana Rising 2047' vision was also achieved.

Over the three-day visit, agreements were entered into for establishing Global Capability Centres, Data Centres, and projects in clean and green energy, along with manufacturing sectors.

Several MoUs focused on promoting AI, sustainability, and skill development programmes.

Revanth Reddy proposed holding a WEF follow-up event in Hyderabad, which received a positive response.

The Chief Minister participated in 12 one-on-one meetings with industry leaders and blue-chip companies.

After Davos, he travelled to Zurich before heading to the US. Revanth Reddy is enrolled in Harvard University's leadership programme, attending "Leadership: 21st Century" at the Kennedy School of Government from 25 to 30 January.

Meanwhile, State Industry Minister D Sridhar Babu and Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy returned to India after attending the event. The Telangana government secured Rs 5.75 lakh crore at the 'Telangana Rising Global Summit' in Hyderabad and secured Rs 1.78 lakh crore investment in the WEF. *—PTI*

- Several MoUs focused on promoting AI, sustainability, and skill development programmes. Revanth Reddy proposed holding a WEF follow-up event in Hyderabad, which received a positive response.

Andhra tries to woo Blackstone and Brookfield

AMARAVATI, 23 JAN

Andhra Pradesh IT Minister Nara Lokesh showcased investment opportunities available in the state to Blackstone and Brookfield Asset Management, two top global institutions managing up to USD 2 trillion in assets, during the 2026 WEF at Davos, Switzerland. The two global institutions manage close to USD 2 trillion in assets, spanning infrastructure, real estate, clean energy, digital platforms, logistics, and transition investing, it added. Lokesh outlined opportunities for 'Grade-A' commercial offices, integrated mixed-use urban development, port-linked industrial and logistics parks, renewable energy and hyperscale data centres in, Amaravati,Rayalaseema and Visakhapatnam. *—PTI*

Fraud case: SC issues fresh notices to Anil Ambani, ADAG

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday issued fresh notices to Anil Ambani and the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group (ADAG) on a PIL seeking a court-monitored probe into alleged massive banking and corporate fraud involving the firm and its group companies.

The top court asked the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate, represented by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, to file status reports in sealed cover in ten days on their ongoing probes into the alleged fraud.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took note of the fact that Anil Ambani and the ADAG had already been served with the notices of the PIL filed by petitioner and former Union secretary EAS Sarma.

On 18 November, last year, the bench issued notices to the Centre, CBI, ED, Anil Ambani and ADAG on the PIL.

The bench said it was granting the last opportunity to Anil Ambani and the ADAG to appear and file their responses in the case.

The counsel for the PIL petitioner said that the CBI and ED are not investigating the alleged complicity of banks and their officials in the huge banking fraud.

The bench asked the Bombay High Court's Registrar General to ensure service of notices on Anil Ambani and the ADAG and file a compliance report.

The apex court then fixed the date for hearing the plea after 10 days. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

TO SELL HUMANOID ROBOTS

AI will outsmart humans in 5 yrs: Musk

Artificial intelligence (AI) is projected to surpass the collective intelligence of the entire human race within the next five years, said **Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, chief engineer at SpaceX, and CTO of xAI** said at the World Economic Forum.

Musk provided this timeline during a recent discussion with Laurence D. Fink, chairman and CEO of BlackRock, regarding the acceleration of computational capabilities and the integration of autonomous systems into the economy.

The transition toward super-human intelligence is expected to occur in incremental stages over the current decade. Musk noted that the pace of development indicates a significant milestone is imminent.

Parallel to advancement of software, the physical application of these systems through robotics is moving into industrial and commercial sectors. Musk indicated that the development of special ware is already yielding results in controlled environments.

According to the projections shared with Fink, these robotic systems will transition from factory floors to the consumer market in the near future. Musk said that by the end of this year, the robots will perform "more complex tasks" while remaining in industrial settings. He added that by the end of next year, the company would likely begin "selling humanoid robots to the public." The move toward public availability depends on meeting specific benchmarks for safety and utility. Musk said this commercial phase begins when there is confidence in "very high reliability." *—ANI*

RUPEE HITS ALL TIME LOW OF 92, SETTLES AT 91.90 AGAINST USD

MUMBAI, 23 JAN

The rupee hit an all-time low of 92 on Friday and recovered marginally to settle at 91.90 (provisional) against the American currency, amid selling pressure from foreign funds and risk-off sentiment in global markets.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee gave up early gains and hit a record low of 92 per US dollar in intraday trade due to weak domestic markets and persistent foreign fund outflows.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 91.45 and then gained ground to touch an intraday high of 91.41 against the greenback. It touched an all-time intraday low of 92.00 before settling for the day at a record closing low of 91.90 (provisional), down 32 paise from its previous closing level.

On Thursday, the rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and ended with a gain of 7 paise at 91.58 against the US dollar. The dollar index traded at 98.36. —

PHOTO: PTI

Mane, Sakshi, better national record scores in air rifle trials

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Maharashtra's Sakshi Sunil Padekar and Railways' Shahu Tushar Mane bettered national record scores in the finals and qualification rounds of the 10m air rifle women's and men's events, respectively, at the national selection trials 1 and 2 (Group A) here on Friday.Sakshi shot 254.3 in the T2 final while Shahu Tushar Mane scored 637.1 in the qualification. Both these scores are better than the national record, but they will not enter the official record books.Olympian Arjun Babuta won the men's T2 final in 10m air rifle, while Sakshi claimed the women's 10m air rifle T2 final. Olympian Rahi Sarnobat claimed the T2 final of women's 25m pistol. Maharashtra's Sakshi produced a commanding performance in the women's 10m air rifle Trial 2, staying firmly in control from qualification through to the final.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Hyderabad Toofans beat HIL GC 2-0 in eliminator

BHUBANESWAR, 23 JAN

Hyderabad Toofans defeated HIL GC 2-0 in the eliminator to book a spin in Qualifier 2 of the men's Hockey India League (HIL) here on Friday.Shilanand Lakra (16th, 39th) stole the show as he scored a brilliant brace to help his side progress ahead in the tournament.It was a lively start to the game, but both sides could break the deadlock in the opening quarter. Hyderabad Toofans won an early penalty corner in the second minute, but they couldn't convert from the opportunity. Moments later, Sam Ward of HIL GC came close to scoring as he deflected the ball towards the goal, but was met by a strong save by Toofans' goalkeeper Jean Paul Danneberg.—*PTI*

Santosh Trophy 26: Nagaland holds Assam to a draw

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

Ato Chopi's late equaliser saw Nagaland hold host Assam to a 3-3 draw in a topsy-turvy contest in the final round of Santosh Trophy 2025-26 at the Dhakuakhana Stadium on Friday. It was the first point for either side in the final round of this season's tournament, with Assam coming into the contest after a 0-1 loss to Tamil Nadu while Nagaland was thrashed 0-4 by defending champion West Bengal in its previous fixture. Nagaland, which qualified for the final round of the Santosh Trophy for the first time this season.—*PTI*

Rangers beat Ludogorets for first Europa League win

LONDON, 23 JAN

Mohamed Diomande's first-half strike gave Rangers their first Europa League win of the season as they beat Ludogorets 1-0 at Ibrox. Danny Rohl has rejuvenated the Gers on the domestic scene since taking over from Russell Martin in October. Still, they went into the penultimate league phase fixture with just one point from 18 and effectively out of the competition. However, on a wet and windy night in Govan, midfielder Diomande put the home side ahead in the 33rd minute, and it proved to be decisive in a mostly controlled performance. Rangers face Porto in their final Europa League fixture in Portugal next week.—*PTI*

Karnataka stares at a big first-innings deficit against MP

Sarfaraz Khan's 227 puts Mumbai in command against Hyderabad

BENGALURU, 23 JAN

RANJI TROPHY

K.V. Aneesh PHOTO: PTI

Sarfaraz Khan PHOTO: PTI

A poor batting performance left Karnataka on the back foot against Madhya Pradesh on the second day of their Ranji Trophy Elite 'B' encounter at the Alur (1) ground in Bengaluru on Friday.

In reply to Madhya Pradesh's 323, Karnataka was found wanting in temperament and shot selection. Except opener K.V. Aneesh (80 batting, 153b, 8x4), the others, including the likes of established names Mayank Agarwal (0), Devdutt Padikkal (0), and Karun Nair (12), let the side down. The home side finished the day on a precarious 168 for eight, trailing by 155 runs.

The slide started with Captain Mayank, who poked at one to backward point at the stroke of lunch. Southpaw Padikkal, the man in form, was trapped on the pads by off-spinner Saransh Jain and adjudged leg-before. Padikkal expressed disappointment at the umpire's decision, suggesting that he got bat on it.

Sarfaraz Khan's strokeful 227 gave Mumbai the bragging rights even as Hyderabad reached 138/2 at stumps on day two, trailing by a massive 422 runs in the first innings of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group D clash here on Friday.

Sarfaraz, resuming on 142, converted his first ton of the season into a huge score against a bowling attack led by star India pacer Mohammed Siraj (1/106), clobbering 19 fours and nine sixes to continue his rich vein of form.

Suved Parkar, picked in place of Ajinkya Rahane, gave a good account of himself by scoring 75 as Mumbai piled up a massive 560 in their first innings.

Hyderabad stumbled early on by losing two wickets, but Rahul Gahlaut (82 not out) and Kodimela Himateja (40 not out) saw them through till the close of play by putting on an unbeaten 100-run stand for the third wicket.

Meanwhile, bad light stopped Puducherry's advance against a struggling Jammu and Kashmir, who had slipped to 150 for six in reply to the hosts' 233.

Abdul Samad was batting on 40 not out with Abid Mushtaq (1 not out) at the other end as J & K trailed by another 83 runs in the first innings.

Delhi, who were shot out for 216 on day one, were under tremendous pressure against Chhattisgarh, who reached 351 for two, having conceded a first-innings lead of 135 runs.

Gill fails again as Saurashtra hammer Punjab by 194 runs

Star batter Shubman Gill endured his second successive unproductive outing as Punjab faltered against Saurashtra spinners, going down by 194 runs on the second day of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group B match here on Friday.

Chasing a daunting 320 on a tough pitch, Gill, Punjab's biggest hope to pull off a win, fell for a 32-ball 14 as the visitors were bundled out for 125 in their second innings.

In the first innings, Gill was dismissed for a two-ball duck.

In both innings, Gill was trapped in front of the wicket by left-arm spinner Parth Bhut, who completed a 10-wicket match haul. —*PTI*

WPL PLAYOFF RACE

DC eye a strong show against RCB to stay alive

VADODARA, 23 JAN

Delhi Capitals will require a strong all-round effort to stop an in-form Royal Challengers Bengaluru on their tracks to stay alive in the race to Women's Premier League playoffs, here on Saturday.

Capitals showed signs of resurgence with a seven-wicket win over the Mumbai Indians in their previous match, moving to fourth place in the table with four points.

But DC will have to raise their game by another notch to beat the Royal Challengers, still unbeaten in this edition of the WPL.

So far, Delhi's batting has been led by veteran Lizelle Lee (213 runs), with Laura Wolvaardt (123) and Shafali Verma (149) giving her occasional support.

But the form of Jemimah Rodrigues was a matter of concern.

Rodrigues made an unbeaten fifty in the win over Mumbai to ease the worries to an extent, and she will have to chip in against RCB with another substantial innings.

DC also has some gaps to plug in the bowling department. Despite having some fancied names, their bowling so far has been led by uncapped pacer Nandani Sharma.

The Chandigarh girl has taken 10 wickets from five matches at an acceptable economy of 8.7. But India spinner Shree Charani (7 wickets, economy: 9.2) and Sneh Rana (1 wicket, economy: 12.4) are yet to hit their straps.

Even veteran South African pacer Marizanne Kapp (4 wickets) has not yet produced the yields, though her economy rate of 5.25 has been top-notch. The match starts at 7.30 pm.—*PTI*

ROHIT ON 13-YEAR ICC TITLE DROUGHT

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

It could be fear of failure among the country's elite batters that led to India's global title drought between 2011 and 2024, T20 World Cup-winning former skipper Rohit Sharma said on Friday.

After the 50-over World Cup triumph in 2011 under the leadership of MS Dhoni, India waited till 2024 for another major trophy, winning the T20 World Cup under Rohit's captaincy.

"I have always believed that when the tide is going down, it's not going to stay down forever. It will come up at some stage. But I didn't think it would take 13 years.

I didn't think it would go down so much that it would take 13 years to come back up," Rohit said in a JioHotstar show. —*PTI*

B'desh to skip T20 WC after impasse with BCCI

DHAKA, 23 JAN

As negotiations fell through, the Bangladesh government made it clear that its men's cricket team won't travel to India for the T20 World Cup due to security concerns. While the government hopes that the International Cricket Council (ICC) will provide justice and move its matches to Sri Lanka, the chances are bleak. It is understood that ICC chairman Jay Shah, who was in Namibia for the U19 World Cup, is in Dubai now, and a formal decision on Bangladesh's replacement would be announced by Saturday.

A desperate Bangladesh Cricket Board has written to the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) of ICC requesting it to overturn the governing body's decision to hold the national men's team's T20 World Cup games in India, but its appeal won't be heard as it is outside the remit of the sub-committee.

Even as the ICC has kept Scotland on stand-by, the BCB under Aminul Islam Bulbul, after being completely cornered, decided to use its last resort approach the DRC headed by Englishman Michael Beloff (King's Counsel). —*PTI*

Pak selectors include Afridi for series against Aus

Pakistani selectors on Friday included fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi in the national T20 squad for the home series against Australia.

The squad announced has no changes from the one that played earlier this month against Sri Lanka, with the exception of Afridi's return from a knee injury and Babar Azam coming back after his largely unsuccessful stint in the Big Bash League.

Australia are set to arrive in the country on 28 January and will play only their second series in the format on Pakistan soil after a solitary T20I in April 2022.

The Pakistani selectors are yet to announce their final World Cup squad amid growing rumours of a possible pullout by the Pakistan board in support of the Bangladesh cricket board's stance of not sending their team to India due to "security concerns".

Pakistan squad: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay (wk), Nawaz, Salman Mirza, Wasim Jnr, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan (wk), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan (wk) and Usman Tariq. —*PTI*

SERIES SCHEDULE

- 1st T20I – 29 January
- 2nd T20I – 31 January
- 3rd T20I – 1 February

TATA STEEL MASTERS

Gukesh to meet Abdusattorov in round 6

WIJK AAN ZEE, 23 JAN

A win in the previous match, boosting his confidence, India's world champion D Gukesh will meet joint leader Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan in the sixth round of the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here.

Gukesh, who defeated Thai Dai Van Nguyen of the Czech Republic with black pieces in the fifth round, will have another black game to negotiate. But, if the form of the youngest ever world champion is any indication, the colour of the pieces should not matter.

With four draws and a lone victory, the Indian is sharing the fourth spot with three points in his bag, a half point behind Abdusattorov, Sindarov, and Hans Niemann of the United States. Arjun Erigaisi started off with a win against R Praggnanandhaa and then had three draws thereafter. He lost to Vladimir Fedoseev, the Russian who is representing Slovenia.

US Grandmaster Daniel died due to a cardiac issue

American chess grandmaster Daniel Naroditsky died last year after suffering an abnormal heartbeat and had multiple drugs in his system at the time, according to a toxicology report that ruled the 29-year- old's death an accident.

Naroditsky, a chess star and streamer credited with helping expand the game's audience, was found dead at his home in Charlotte, North Carolina, in October. —*PTI*

SINDHU, LAKSHYA LOSE IN QFS; INDIAN CHALLENGE ENDS

JAKARTA, 23 JAN

PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen suffered straight-game losses to their respective opponents in the women's and men's singles quarterfinals, marking the end of the Indian challenge in the USD 500,000 Indonesia Masters badminton tournament here on Friday.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, lost to top seed and world number four Chen Yu Fei of China 13-21, 17-21 in the quarterfinal contest that lasted 42 minutes to bow out of the Super 500 event.

With Friday's loss, Sindhu trails Fei 6-8 in head-to-head record.

The Indian's last win over Fei was way back in 2019.In the men's singles, Lakshya, a 2021 world championships bronze medallist, was beaten 18-21, 20-22 by Thailand's rising talent Panitchaphon Teeraratsakul in a close match that lasted 46 minutes.

The 21-year-old Thai had also accounted for 2024 Paris Olympics bronze medallist Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia in the pre-quarterfinals. —*PTI*

Sabalenka advances to the 4th round

MELBOURNE, 23 JAN

Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka overcame several bouts of inconsistent play Friday to beat Anastasia Potapova 7-6 (4), 7-6 (7) and advance to the fourth round at the Australian Open.

Sabalenka, chasing her third Australian Open title in four years, led 6-5 and 40-0 in the opening set but Potapova saved all three set points to send it to a tiebreaker. Sabalenka led 3-0 in the tiebreaker before Potapova leveled at 3-3.

De Minaur keeps home hopes alive

Alex de Minaur underlined his credentials as the leading home hope at the Australian Open on Friday, securing a 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 win over American 29th seed Frances Tiafoe to reach the fourth round for a fifth successive year.

Carlos Alcaraz wins third-round match

Carlos Alcaraz acknowledged that while he won the third-round match, he lost the battle of the drop shots against Corentin Moutet.

That could be a first for the 22-year-old Spaniard, who grew up relentlessly practicing his drop shots and is now at the Australian Open chasing a career Grand Slam.

Aryna Sabalenka PHOTO: PTI

Australian Open to start earlier on Saturday

Temperatures of 40 °C are forecast to roast the Australian Open on Saturday, forcing a change of schedule and warnings for fans.

Play will start in Melbourne at 10:30 am in the main arenas, compared to the normal 11:00 or 11:30 am.

Other courts will start match action as early as 10 am. —*PTI*

AMERICAN EXPRESS

Slow starts for Bhatia, Sudarshan, Theegala

LA QUINTA, 23 JAN

Indian-origin golfers Akshay Bhatia, Sudarshan Yellamaraju, and Sahith Theegala made slow starts at La Quinta Country Club to find themselves down on leader board at the American Express.

Bhatia opened with a solid 4-under 68 to sit at -71, while Sudarshan, coming off an impressive tied-13th finish last week, carded a 2-under 70 on the Nicklaus Tournament Course but found himself down the leaderboard at T-106 due to the exceptionally low scoring.

Theegala, competing on the Pete Dye Stadium Course, the toughest of the three, posted a 1-under 71 and was T-118 at day's end.

Akshay Bhatia PHOTO: PTI

Scheffler PHOTO: PTI

Scheffler starts the new year with a 63

The idea for Scottie Scheffler was to get a gauge on his game at The American Express, and all appeared to be in good working order. He made birdies on half of his holes for a 9-under 63 to join a parade of low scores that left him one shot out of the lead. Min Woo Lee and Pierceson Coody led the way at 10-under 62 on the Nicklaus Tournament course at PGA West, the easiest of the three on the rotation. Scheffler played at La Quinta, where he didn't miss a green until the 17th hole. He chipped that in for a birdie. "I think the hardest part about these tests, where you have to shoot so low, is you can only shoot so many under par in a round of golf," Scheffler said. "The easier tests, where the scores are crazy low, if you start falling behind, it's a lot harder to keep up, so you have to keep pace out here." —*PTI*

AFI to select Indian team for Asian Cross Country C'ships

RANCHI, 23 JAN

The 60th National Cross-Country Championships to be held here on Saturday will serve as the selection trial for the continental event in Japan next month.

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) on Friday said it will select both senior and junior (U20) athletes for the Asian Cross Country Championships during the Ranchi event.

The top four runners in each of the senior (men and women) and junior (men and women) groups will be selected for the Indian team.

"The AFI will select a 16-member national team, including eight in the women's section, for the 18th Asian Cross-Country Championships to be held on February 21 in Fukuoka, Japan," AFI president Bahadur Singh Sagoo said.

Thirty-five teams, including affiliated state units, will compete in the National Cross Country Championships on Saturday. Overall,732 athletes, including 328 female runners, have confirmed their participation in the first domestic competition ofthe 2026 season. —*PTI*